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TIMES
DAILY

2022-23

ATHLETE of the YEAR

Edwards, Siegel
big stars for
separate sets
of Tigers.



Lion-sized aspirations



Chloe Siegel, after a record-setting, victory-filled career at Deshler, has moved across the bridge to North Alabama. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Siegel eager to help UNA basketball win

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Chloe Siegel's schedule is quite full these days.

There have already been practices, weightlifting sessions and summer classes. A new campus and teammates

to learn, too. It's all part of trying to navigate life as a newly minted Division I college athlete.

The former Deshler basketball and volleyball standout and current North Alabama basketball freshman also spent the previous week helping out with a few different camps. Busy, indeed.

"I think it's kind of fun," Siegel said. "With the little kids' camp, those are kids who look up to you. ... You're in college, you're right across the street and they're

probably coming to watch you play. I just like that. Any interactions with kids, I think is fun."

Siegel would certainly be a good choice to emulate.

From her basketball time at Deshler, she holds the listed National Federation of State High School Associations record for career 3-pointers. She has a state championship from last year and was named this year's state Class 4A player of the year by the Alabama Sports Writers Association.

So, any advice for those youngsters? "Work your tail off," said Siegel, the TimesDaily girls athlete of the year. "That's how I got here, by working really, really hard. And set goals for yourself that you can see yourself achieving and want to achieve. If you do that, it'll happen.

"I would also say just cherish the moments. I can remember being an eighth-grader starting on varsity and

SEE SIEGEL, G5



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On the road again



Junior Miles Edwards, after a big basketball season, turned in an even-better year for Lauderdale County baseball. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Edwards gets set for action-packed summer

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Miles Edwards wasn't looking forward to the task waiting for him at home later. Set to involve fitting almost a week's worth of clothes into a suitcase. He and

his family were set to head to Gulf Shores for a little sunshine and beach time.

"There are worse things to do," Edwards grinned.

It might not have helped that Edwards, the TimesDaily boys athlete of the year, just got back from the road. The Lauderdale County standout has been keeping himself rather busy since school let out with various summer workouts and playdates for both basketball and baseball.

And the Tigers had just gotten

back from a three-day hoops camp in Guntersville.

"Tiring," Edwards said when asked how it was trying to fit everything into a schedule. "Very, very tiring. Especially basketball because you're playing multiple games in a day, go to sleep and wake up and do it again the next day. It'll wear you out, but I enjoy doing it. This will be my last basketball season coming up, so I'm making the most out of it."

One thing Edwards claims won't be

back when it's time to step on the hardwood? The mustache he's been sporting. While it's drawn some strong reviews from friends, those in the Edwards household have been lukewarm about it at best.

"I grew it during baseball season and once we lost in the playoffs, I shaved it and everyone got mad at me and I was like, 'All right. I grow it back for the

SEE EDWARDS, G9

SIEGEL

From Page G2

now I'm in college. Time flies really fast. So, appreciate the moments."

Certainly some words of wisdom. And Siegel would like to create some more moments during her time at UNA. At the top of the list? Well, that's a fairly easy answer to come up with.

"I want to win an ASUN championship," Siegel said. "From the time I lost to Priceville in that last game (with Deshler), my mind automatically went to what I can do to help my team win in college and win a championship. Florida Gulf Coast wins it almost every single year, but coming in I'd like to help break that."

"And make some noise in the (NCAA) tournament. It's always been a dream of mine to play in the tournament. I feel like that's every kid's dream playing basketball."

It'll be tough. Florida Gulf Coast has won eight of the last 10 ASUN tournament championships. (There was no tournament in 2020 due to COVID-19.)

That can be figured out during the season. Right now, Siegel is trying to get used to a host of new teammates.



Chloe Siegel helped lead Deshler volleyball to a 45-6 record and a berth in the Class 4A semifinals as a senior. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"I think it's been going pretty well," Siegel said. "They're funny. We were sitting in the locker room last night and they were cracking me up. They're hilarious. Some of them, you might look at them and think they don't speak a lot, but they have some jokes."

Alexis Callins and Jade Moore are the leaders in that department, according to Siegel. And where might the freshman rank? Probably last, Siegel said.

That's OK. Perhaps setting another 3-point record might be more her forte. "I hope so," Siegel said. "It might take

Girls athlete of the year

- 2023:** Chloe Siegel, Deshler
- 2022:** Karly Weathers, Loretto
- 2021:** Karly Weathers, Loretto
- 2020:** not named (pandemic)
- 2019:** Sara Puckett, Muscle Shoals
- 2018:** Taylor Aikerson, Deshler
- 2017:** Lilly Holmes, Florence
- 2016:** Erin Jewell, Brooks
- 2015:** Lauren Cantrell, Deshler
- 2014:** Cele Moon, Wilson
- 2013:** Ciarra Edwards, Wilson

Girls athletic program of the year

- 2023:** Mars Hill
- 2022:** Brooks
- 2021:** Rogers
- 2020:** not named (pandemic)
- 2019:** Rogers
- 2018:** Deshler
- 2017:** Deshler
- 2016:** Wilson
- 2015:** Deshler

me a little bit and that's a goal, but I'm more team first. It's about helping the team succeed."

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Defensive bond

Winding road brought Hurley, Coman together

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

It wasn't the most narrow path for Kivon Coman to become a high school football coach.

The 30-year-old had originally hoped for a long and successful NFL career. He graduated from Florence High in 2012 and went on to play college football at Mississippi State.

Coman played safety for the Bulldogs, appearing in 49 games from 2013-16. In that same time, however, he went through three surgeries on the same ankle. Still, he got a chance as an undrafted free agent with the New York Jets.

When the same ankle got hurt again in camp, he decided to step away from playing football. Thus, his NFL dream was over.

Little did he know that opened a new opportunity.

In a desperate plea on his flight home from New York, he made a phone call to Byron Graham — Florence's athletic director and Coman's mentor — and got some direction on where to go next.

"I told him I want to be around sports," Coman said. "He told me to do two things. He told me to pray about it and if I was serious, to go back to school and get a degree, because that's how I would make more money doing coaching."

That's all Coman needed to hear. He went to Athens State and got a degree in physical education. Now, he teaches P.E. at Florence and coaches defensive backs for the football team.

But he had to start out coaching middle school. At that point though, he would've been fine coaching pee-wee. That was how, seemingly by destiny, he met Jahllil Hurley.

"(When I was told to start in middle school), I said 'I don't care, I love ball,'" Coman said. "The very first kid I met was Jahllil. He walked up to me and introduced himself like a young man, looked me in the eye and said, 'I want to play



Florence's Jahllil Hurley, who first met Kivon Coman as an eighth-grader, met Sven — who currently resides with Florence Lauderdale Animal Services — just a few days ago. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

college football. Can you get me there?"

"I said, 'It's gonna take hard work, but I can help you get there.'"

More than four years later, Hurley — now a senior — has signed to play football at Alabama. There weren't many days over that time the two spent apart from one another. They worked nonstop on the field as Hurley kept getting better and better.

Coman helped him just as much off the field as well, giving as much advice and wisdom as he could. He saw himself in Hurley increasingly more every day.

"Ever since (we met), he's been just like a brother, like a son to me," Coman said. "What he's been through his whole life. ... He hasn't had it easy growing up. Just seeing him — everything he does, he gives his all — it's great to see."

Florence saw three head coaching

changes during Hurley's four years on the team. Coman, however, was a constant. Any time Hurley needed something he knew exactly where to go.

"He's taught me everything I know. Just learning the game," said Hurley, the 2022 TimesDaily large school football player of the year. "He's been like a real good father figure to me. He's a big part of why I'm where I'm at today.

"He means a lot to me."

Maybe with some better luck, Coman would be an NFL veteran right now. Or as Hurley looks at it, the luck was on his side a bit. He has benefited the most from Coman's winding road to becoming a coach.

"I think about that a little bit. But he got me where I'm at," Hurley said of Coman's injuries. "He told me that he wanted me to do what he couldn't do.

So that's what I'm gonna do."

Now Hurley makes sure to let his coach know who the better player is.

"I'm talking stuff with him every day," Hurley said with a laugh. "Oh yeah. I'm faster than him and he thinks he's faster than me. But he's not faster than me."

When Hurley moved to Tuscaloosa, it was the first time he and Coman were separated since 2018. But they will still keep in contact whenever they need to catch up or get some advice.

Otherwise, Coman will continue coaching and Hurley will continue to make his mentor proud.

"The sky's the limit for him. Whatever he wants to do in life (he can)," Coman said. "I thank God for it every day. The sport of football, it's taken me a long way and now it's gonna take him wherever he wants to go."



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Let it flow

Unlike football, Thompson's hair a work in progress

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Damian Thompson emerged as Mars Hill's top receiver and defensive back this season. He made plenty of improvements to his skills and took on an important role for the Panthers as a junior.

His hair, on the other hand, is still very much a work in progress. He'll style it on certain occasions (like taking a photo with his dog Zoey). Other times, the hair has a mind of its own.

Thompson doesn't put too much pressure on his hairstyle. Whatever happens, happens.

"I don't really have to do anything with my hair in the morning. I just wake up and I just go with it," Thompson said. "I don't really have a hair routine. I just let it down or just let it flow up. Sometimes it's crazy and I just deal with it."

Coach Darrell Higgins deserves some credit for Thompson's improvement on the field. But he might deserve every bit of it for the hairstyling.

"He pulled me off and said, 'You need to get looking right before you go (for the picture),' " said Thompson, the 2022 TimesDaily small schools football player of the year. "I was like, 'yes sir I will.'"

After all, Higgins just wants what's best for his players. That could mean winning games, or in this case, having the best look possible.

"I talk to him all the time about looking the part, about trying to look professional and be somebody that when you go out in public, it's a good look," Higgins said. "I'm glad he showed up with his hair looking good."

"Looking the part" may also help Thompson out while getting looked at to play in college. He said coaches and recruiters from all over are texting him almost every day.

It has been a bit overwhelming for Thompson at times. But he knows this is only the beginning of what will probably be a frenzy going into his senior year.

"Coaches text me all the time asking



Mars Hill's Damian Thompson decided taking a picture with Zoey was important enough to style his hair for. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

me to get down (to their campus). I just tell them I'll get down there whenever I can because there's so many texting my phone," Thompson said. "It gets a little tiring, but I just have to deal with it."

The heavy recruitment doesn't come as much of a surprise to Higgins and the Panthers' coaches. Thompson, who had 13 receiving touchdowns, an interception-return touchdown and a score on a kickoff and punt return, had his best season yet.

They knew, however, the first-team All-State player was capable of being a

great athlete a while ago.

"He's really been unfazed by all the attention. It's been good to watch how humble he is with all the stuff that's coming in for him," Higgins said. "We knew he had a lot of talent at an early age. He's been playing varsity for us since eighth grade.

"... Being at a small school, when you got a talent like that, we gotta put him everywhere we can to help us win games. He just likes playing and he's got a unique ability."

There's still one more high school

season for Thompson to worry about before he goes to college. The Panthers — in their first season in Class 3A, which they were ranked No. 1 for most of the season — were upset by Geraldine in the second round of the playoffs.

That doesn't take too much away from how much Thompson enjoyed it and how much he's looking forward to his senior year.

"It was a great regular season. We beat some tough competition," he said. "It was a fun season and I wouldn't ask to do anything else."

EDWARDS

From Page G4

summer,'" Edwards said with a laugh. "Once basketball rolls around I have to shave it again."

And for those wondering if Edwards would perhaps try an old-school style, maybe the handlebar look or waxing it to make it curl at the ends, that's not likely to happen. Sometimes, the simpler way is the best way to go.

"I think I'd look really dumb like that," Edwards said. "But I wish I could do that. I think it'd be awesome for maybe a day, but I don't think I'd like it long term."

But never say never, especially with Edwards looking to play college baseball. He's set to begin taking visits this summer, too. Add it to an already busy schedule.

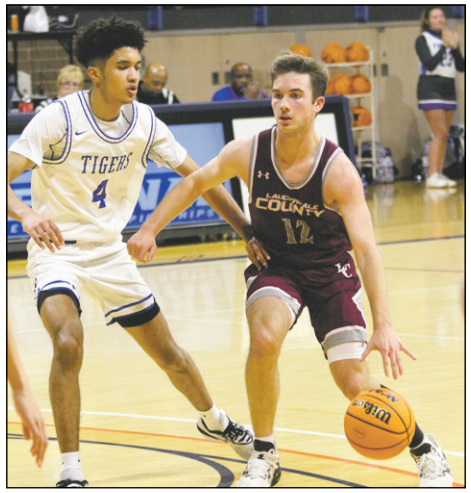
And Edwards' want list isn't too long. Quality coaches are at the top, as is a good baseball program. A decent school academically certainly won't hurt, either. It should be an interesting experience.

"I enjoy it because you get to go visit different colleges and see what they're like," Edwards said of the recruiting process. "My mom's always told me you'll know the right college for you when you get there. So, hopefully we'll find the right college."

But before worrying about college, Edwards has a few more items to check off his to-do list at Lauderdale County first. Naturally, they require being measured for a ring size.

"My goal next year is to win a state championship," Edwards said. "There has never been a boys state champion in basketball or baseball (at Lauderdale County). That has to be the goal."

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Lauderdale County's Miles Edwards averaged almost 18 points, led the Tigers to a 20-win season and the Northwest Regional and was honorable mention All-State. [DEANGELO MCDANIEL/FOR THE TIMESDAILY]

Boys athlete of the year

- 2023: Miles Edwards, Lauderdale Co.
- 2022: Tyler Murks, Brooks
- 2021: Tyler Murks, Brooks
- 2020: not named (pandemic)
- 2019: Colt Smith, Mars Hill
- 2018: Ryan Weathers, Loretto
- 2017: Malik Smith, Sheffield
- 2016: Brax Garrett, Florence
- 2015: Keaton Anderson, Florence
- 2014: Kendrick Doss, Florence
- 2013: Thomas Burrows, Mars Hill

Boys athletic program of the year

- 2023: Deshler
- 2022: Mars Hill
- 2021: Russellville
- 2020: not named (pandemic)
- 2019: Mars Hill
- 2018: Lauderdale Co.
- 2017: Muscle Shoals
- 2016: Russellville
- 2015: Russellville

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LARGE SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

Quick connection

Siegel impressed Killen with her 'crazy' work ethic

By **Hayden Flatt**
Sports Writer

Chloe Siegel and coach Jana Killen have built quite the relationship over the years.

Killen first coached Siegel in basketball when she was in the fourth grade. At Deshler, Killen coaches volleyball and basketball — both of which Siegel starred in for the Tigers.

The two have experienced a lot of success together in both sports. Last season, Deshler won state in basketball. This volleyball season, Siegel helped lead the Tigers to the state semifinals.

Luckily for her, she's gotten pretty close with her coach (is there really any other option?). They spend a lot of time together every day.

"Let's see, I sleep eight hours then I go home for two to do homework," said Siegel, the All-Area large school volleyball player of the year.

"So, 14 hours?"

A longtime volleyball and basketball coach, Killen has coached plenty of good athletes. She said Siegel ranks among the best she has ever had on her teams, but how she uses her talent is what set her apart.

Killen developed more and more respect for Siegel, who even challenged her to become a better coach, as time passes. She also rivals how competitive Killen is, which isn't exactly easy to do.

"Her competitive side is way above par for most kids," Killen said. "She's a very good athlete but her work ethic is crazy. She's not scared to work."

The coach noticed there was something different about Siegel as soon as she stepped on the court.

"I knew how competitive she was in the fourth grade," Killen said. "She was starting in the eighth grade, she was my starting varsity setter and she started on basketball. ... I knew (when Siegel was) in fourth grade — you know when kids are competitive — I knew she was extremely competitive.

"(She was) very serious. She wanted to



Chloe Siegel said nobody — not even Curry — thought Deshler would have much success in volleyball this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

work as a little girl. I knew when Chloe was in sixth grade that she was gonna be my varsity setter in the eighth grade."

No challenge has proved too difficult for Siegel so far. But this past volleyball season was one of the toughest yet. The Tigers graduated 11 seniors from last year's team. Siegel and her younger sister, Ava, were the only two returning players.

There were struggles at first, but they didn't persist for long. The Tigers ended up with a 45-6 record.

"I knew coming into this season everybody's gonna be looking towards me," said Siegel, who signed to play basketball

at UNA. "It was very important to us. We still wanted to be good.

"... Everybody was doubting us and we proved basically everybody in the state wrong. We just wanted to come in and win."

Killen let out a laugh when she recalled what the team looked like over the summer. A lot changed in a hurry.

"It was a work in progress. When we had tryouts and summer ball and everything, we were like, 'Oh, me.' But we just kept getting better and jelling," she said. "We were just trying to be able to compete. Late at night we would be in

(the gym) and I would see we were getting better.

"... But Chloe, she went above and beyond. She became so creative on how to get points."

Siegel even admitted the success came as a big surprise. A trip to state was hardly in her mind just a few months before it actually happened.

"Nobody (thought we'd go to state)," she laughed. "Nobody on the team thought we were even gonna make it out of area. ... In the back of my mind, I was just thinking, I want to prove everybody wrong."

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SMALL SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

Net worth

Covenant coach fueled Gann's volleyball passion

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Covenant Christian had a pretty fun 2022 volleyball season.

The Eagles won 35 matches. Their postseason run took them to Birmingham, where they finished as state runners-up. That was the first time in school history a Covenant girls team reached a state final.

"It was so fun. Especially going to Birmingham and getting to stay in a room with my teammates and going out to eat," Ashlee Gann said. "We had a parade for us as we left to go to Birmingham and that was so much fun.

"The courts are so big and nice (at state). That made it worth it, just being able to play on those courts."

Gann, the 2022 TimesDaily small school girls volleyball player of the year, was at the forefront of it all.

"This year was awesome," coach Alyson Estave said. "A huge part of that is because of Ashlee. She is not only a beast on the court, she is one of those that if she's having a good game, everyone thinks, 'I can have a good game because Ashlee's on my side.' She was the morale boost, she was the leader."

But it wasn't that way until recently. Gann had been focused on basketball since she was 6 years old. So much that her grandfather had a hardwood, regulation-size court built at his house.

The two ran drills together for years to sharpen Gann's basketball skills.

"He would make me go out there and dribble and close my eyes," she said. "He made goggles where I couldn't see the ball out of sunglasses."

It wasn't until around two years ago she started taking volleyball seriously. At that point, perhaps to her grandfather's chagrin, basketball took a bit of a backseat.

Gann still played basketball as a senior along with most of her volleyball teammates. She mentioned that at a small school like Covenant, they went straight



Despite the postseason success, Covenant Christian's Ashlee Gann said her favorite part of volleyball was practicing. (Binx does not take part.) [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

from volleyball to basketball with little practice in between.

Over the summer, however, it was volleyball that received the most attention.

"Volleyball just kinda came more naturally," Gann said. "I think since I played basketball for so long that volleyball was kinda newer. ... I just like hitting it. I don't know, it's just fun to be able to spike it at people. I like that."

Estave served the biggest role in helping Gann appreciate volleyball. The sport

changed from just hitting a ball around to reading defense, knowing where to place the ball and how hard to hit it.

The coach said once Gann understood that, it was nearly impossible to get her out of the gym. And Covenant's practices were nearly four hours long to begin with.

"I wanted (the players) to just appreciate and love the game more. (Gann) is one of the ones out of that group of seniors that took it and ran with it," Estave said.

"I have to kick her out of the gym.

"She's constantly (saying), 'What can I do to get better?' Once she understood the game more, it was like I opened up a whole different mind frame for her."

Despite all the team success, Gann said the most memorable part of the year will be what she spent most of her time doing.

"I'm gonna remember practices," she said. "Our coach always made it fun and I was there with my friends."

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

More to accomplish

Mary Anna Trimble left motivated after tough state finish

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Austin Phillips went ahead to the one-mile mark of the race, the spot he normally waits for his runners to arrive.

At the Class 6A state championship race, that meant waiting for Mary Anna Trimble, Muscle Shoals' only representative there. She was usually the first runner Phillips saw every race throughout the season.

This time, however, he waited longer than he was used to. And then a little more. It didn't take long to realize something went wrong.

"I could tell early on in the race that something was off," Phillips said. "... Mary Anna was the only girl runner that I had that day, so I was watching

her obviously very closely.

"I could tell at one mile that something was just weird for her. She was about 15th or 16th (place) and then I saw her later on and she had dropped back to around the 30s."

That type of run wasn't normal for Trimble, who expected a top-10 finish that day. Brutal conditions — the final race of the day, rainy conditions and a beat up, muddy trail — provided additional cause for injury.

Within the first mile of the race, Trimble slipped and hurt her hip.

"It was pretty bad, it was uncomfortable," Trimble said of her fall. "I finished the race, but it was pretty painful to go through. It took a lot in me, but it was good to finish. I felt accomplished finishing the race even though I was hurt."

Trimble finished in 40th place. But at that point, crossing the finish line was a big enough feat of its own.

"I didn't know about it, I could just

tell she was hurt," Phillips said. "Whenever she runs, it's a pretty smooth run. It doesn't look like she's laboring at all. ... That's the type of competitor she is. A lot of people would be done and she still fought and finished the race."

In the sectional race, Trimble finished third after being sick and hardly running the week prior. She won three races during the season and never finished behind 12th place. Her personal record was 18:54, which would have been good for fourth at state. That time is also the Muscle Shoals girls school record.

The good news for Trimble, the TimesDaily's 2022 girls runner of the year, is that the state championship wasn't her final race. She has plenty to look forward to for her senior season.

"I just want to push myself to set even better goals for next year and just have a higher place at state next year," Trimble said. "Just use this (state) race as motivation to push myself for next year, too."



Muscle Shoals' Mary Anna Trimble and Jeans can do plenty of practicing together in preparation for next cross country season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]



Hatton's Calob Miley initially joined the cross country team to be with his friends more, but he quickly took it seriously.

[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

'A natural'

Convinced by friends, Miley excelled in 1st year

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Calob Miley sat back and relaxed as his friends ran cross country their freshman year. It wasn't something he was particularly interested in.

That was until freshman year ended. This past summer, before his sophomore year, Miley decided to give the sport a chance. Although, it still took some convincing.

"I really didn't get into running (at first). It was just my friends that were running that really got me into it," Miley said. "Ever since I went to practice the first time I knew I liked it."

"I just kept grinding over the summer and succeeded at it."

Perhaps it was just a desire for competition. Or maybe the fear of missing out on time with his friends was insurmountable. Whatever it was, the decision paid off.

Hatton's cross country coach, Brandon Barringer, tried convincing Miley to join his team earlier. It didn't work out too well for him, but that's what friends are for.

"Very thankful (that he joined the team). I talked to him about two years ago trying to get him to run and he was kind of iffy," Barringer said of Miley. "Some of the boys on the team talked him into coming out and he was just a natural."

"... I was on him for a while. Every time I saw him in the halls, asking him — I knew he looked like he could run — trying to get more people to come out."

After showing up to the first practice, he quickly impressed his friends,

his coach and — most surprising of all — himself.

"I just went to that first practice and I really liked it," Miley said. "It really clicked with me. ... There was a night race we went to and I ran a 16:42. I was like, 'Wow, I'm really doing good, for my first year actually.'

"A lot of people told me that and I was like, 'I really want to get better than I am.'"

Miley, the TimesDaily's 2022 boys cross country runner of the year, won the Northwest Alabama championship, which included 275 boys runners. He also won the Class 1A-2A section four race and finished ninth in the 1A-2A state championship. As a team, Hatton finished second in state.

"I think the experience is gonna help him a lot," Barringer said. "He learned a lot this year, I believe. He'll be better off next year. I think he'll reach his goals."

SMALL SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL

Ball year-round

Wayne County's Baugus has summer schedule booked

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

It's a good thing Blair Baugus enjoys playing basketball. She doesn't get much of a break from it throughout the year.

Between Wayne County's deep post-season run — finishing 36-1 and state runner-up — and playing AAU basketball, there's virtually no time off from playing. The AAU practices had some overlap with the high school season, and tournaments begin at the end of May. Meanwhile, Baugus squeezes in playing softball for the Wildcats.

To say the least, she's a bit busy this time of year.

"We usually play about three or four (games) each tournament," Baugus said about the AAU schedule. "We have about six tournaments or so. About 24 games, maybe closer to 30. But it's really fun. I like it a lot and I wouldn't change it."

Loretto's Ally Weathers is the only player Baugus is familiar with on the team. The rest is made up of players from Alabama. So it's a little too early to determine how good the team is.

"I don't really know (how good) yet. I've only been to two practices," Baugus said. "There's been three practices, but I couldn't make the first one — I was in the state championship game that day — so the first two have been pretty good so far."

"I don't really know how we'll be. First tournaments are usually a little rough. As we go, it gets a lot better."

Of course, they try to assemble the best team possible. Especially when they know what the competition will bring. Baugus — the TimesDaily's small school player of the year — will certainly make the team better. Where the familiarity lacks, the talent will help. And the awkwardness from the teammates shouldn't last too long.

It's a skill Baugus, a sophomore, knows she'll need sooner than later.

"It's a lot different (than high school)," she said. "Different players, getting to know people that you don't talk to every day. Adjusting to all these different people is a big change, but I enjoy getting to know new people. That's how college is gonna be."



Wayne County's Blair Baugus is getting ready for a busy summer of playing AAU basketball tournaments. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

A few tournaments are "local" — around three hours away. The rest are in places like Virginia, Orlando, Florida and Chicago. Wherever the team travels to, there is going to be daunting competition waiting. There will also be colleges watching.

"It's changed a lot. I played AAU but it wasn't all summer long," Wayne County coach Molly Ashley said. "It was about three or four tournaments and that was about it. It's like any other sport. Basketball has become a year-round thing."

Most of the time, the competition is ruthless and much different than a typical high school team. That's something

Baugus anticipates and is excited about.

"As we get older, it's a lot more competition," Baugus said. "It's definitely gonna be harder this year than it was last year, but it's gonna get harder every year."

It all plays in to Baugus' goal, which is to just get better. If that means playing games throughout the year and facing some of the top players in the country, it's worth it.

Then, when it's time to think about getting Wayne County another chance to win a state championship, she'll be prepared.

"(AAU) helps her a ton. You're playing the best of the best and you're traveling to

all these elite tournaments," Ashley said. "I think that really pushes her, because she has to go against players who are bigger, maybe a little bit stronger."

So while most of her classmates go on vacations, get jobs or just relax over summer break, Baugus (and her parents) will be booked up. She probably won't ever have a normal summer break again, but that's OK.

"Just because I love basketball so much," Baugus said. "It's definitely changed my summers from when I was younger, but I like it a lot. Other people may disagree, they'd rather have a summer at home. But I like this better."

Open wings

For Kellogg, Covenant quickly became new home

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

It wasn't much more than a year ago that the Lawrence County School Board announced the closing of R.A. Hubbard. That wasn't easy news for the students and their parents to take.

Trey Kellogg, who played basketball and football there, figured there was nothing he could do about it. That didn't change his feelings, however.

"I was kinda hurt when I found out (it was closing)," Kellogg said. "I really didn't know at the time. I didn't know where I was gonna go.

"I just ended up at Covenant."

The closure affected his family just as much. It knew there was probably a move incoming to go to a new school. Kellogg's mother, Lorinda Jones, had called the area home and was unsure of where to go or what to do. Upon meeting some people around the Covenant Christian community, everything became a bit easier.

"It was rough, I guess, with the school closing and we had always been at Hubbard," Jones recalled. "Change was a little different for us, but once we got down here and got to meet the Covenant family, they welcomed us in and made us feel like we've been here the whole time Trey has been in high school."

All things considered, things turned out pretty well for him. The uncertainty Kellogg felt about his future started to vanish. The discomfort turned to relief. His school closing still stings — that probably won't ever go away — but his arrival to Covenant Christian quickly turned into one of the things he's most grateful for.

"I'm glad that it worked out this way," Kellogg said. "Knowing that after my school closed I didn't know what my next step was gonna be."

The first step for Kellogg was finding his way to the basketball team (it wasn't difficult for coach Bret Waldrep to find the 6-foot-4 kid walking around). The



Trey Kellogg is fortunate that he ended up at Covenant Christian, where he also got to meet Binks, after his school closed. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

first step for his new teammates was introducing themselves and making Kellogg feel as comfortable as possible.

"It's been pretty cool knowing them this past year and getting closer to them," Kellogg said of the other basketball players at Covenant.

As school began this year, Kellogg and Jones' questions of what would come next were answered. They found a new home with people that made it feel as such.

While playing games — with the Eagles often winning by 20 points or more — Kellogg was hyping up his new teammates, clapping with them on the bench and sometimes even cracking a smile.

It was the first season the junior, along with sophomore Jalen Chandler, was playing games with the people that had played together their entire lives. But looking on from afar, it seemed like they had all known each other for a decade.

"I appreciate (the other students)," said Jones, who was always in the stands with the other players' parents during games. She often handed out high-fives and led in the cheering. "At first, he was still a little shy and getting to know everybody. ... Everybody treats us like we've been here for years."

The season progressed, and it turned into a back-to-back Class 1A state championship for Covenant. Kellogg became

a first-team All-State player and the TimesDaily's small school boys player of the year.

And now — Jones doesn't really know how it happened, but she accepts it — Kellogg can be seen playing baseball with many of his basketball teammates. It's his first year playing, but he got talked into it.

Call it a triumph by the people that not too long ago were complete strangers to him.

"I didn't expect it," Kellogg laughed. "Some of my teammates I play basketball with persuaded me to come and join the team. ... It took them a while. They kept trying though and got me out there."

LARGE SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL

Leading by example

KJ Anderson
role model to his
younger brothers

By **Hayden Flatt**
Sports Writer

Getting KJ Anderson to talk a lot isn't the easiest thing to do. The Deshler senior is known to be pretty quiet.

At home, on the other hand? When his two younger brothers are there, not so much. Korrian, 14, and Kyrie, 7, know exactly how to get their older brother out of his shell.

It usually takes some instigating and prodding. Maybe even being a little annoying at some points. But eventually, they'll leave KJ no other option.

Let the wrestling begin. KJ gave a simple, affirmative answer when asked if the younger siblings ever get to keep the Anderson-home championship belt.

"No."

He tends to get creative with his finishing moves.

"They play fight and all that different type of stuff," KJ said. "I be slamming them."

That's only a small aspect of their relationship. The rest of the time, KJ is the big brother. He's constantly setting the best example he can. Knowing — with a larger age gap for Kyrie especially — that they're constantly looking up to him, there's no other option.

"He's a big role model for them," said Kevin Anderson, KJ's dad. "They look up to him a lot. They're always watching him. You gotta do the right things, and he always does. He's a big part of (their lives)."

It's a responsibility that KJ takes pride in. Whether it be at home, out in public or while they watch him play basketball, they see what he's doing.

For the soft-spoken Anderson, he does it with his actions.

Very rarely does he do something his younger brothers shouldn't.

"They look up to me," KJ said. "I'm the oldest. I gotta set an example for them and lead them in the right way."

That's made life a little easier for the parents. Kevin laughed about the often-overheard wrestling matches but noted there's "never any animosity" associated with it.

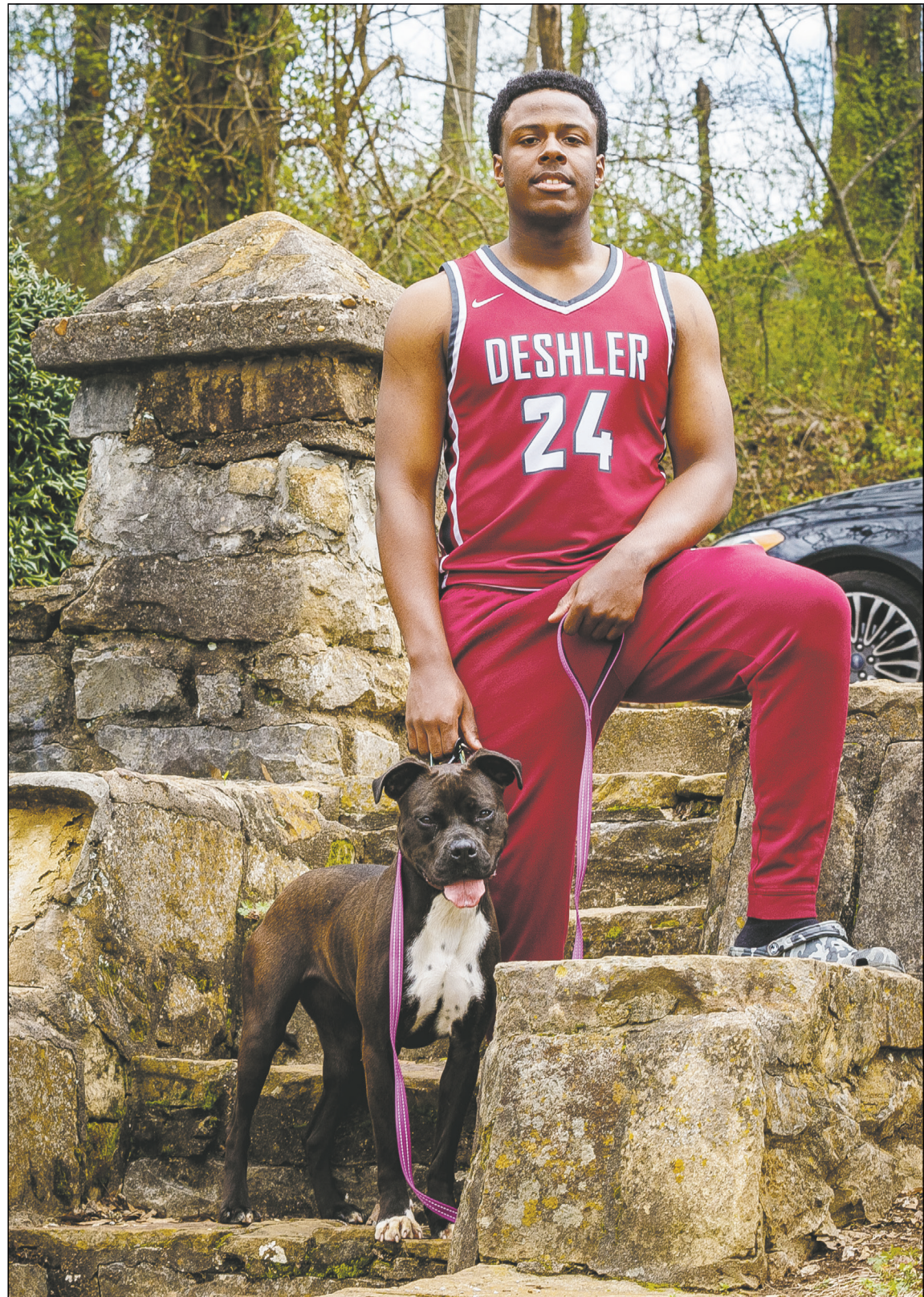
In a few months, KJ — who will play next season for Wallace State-Hanceville — won't be around every day. Korrian and Kyrie, who have never gone a day without their older brother around, will have to make the biggest adjustment. It's going to feel a little strange for his parents as well.

"It's kinda hard, kinda bittersweet," Kevin said. "It's been amazing for us. Sports, school and him growing up. Me and my wife knew one day it would happen, we just didn't think it would happen this fast. But we're excited for him and for what he's gonna do in his next chapter."

There are occasions where the shyness goes away for KJ. He doesn't refrain while with his lifelong friends and teammates. And there's no sign of it when the TimesDaily's large school All-Area boys player of the year is on the court.

Playing games is where he's most comfortable. It's where he scored 18.2 points per game this season and was a first-team All-State player. It's the times he'll miss most about high school.

"I had my brothers there with me, playing on the same team. We've been together since TVBA," KJ said. "I'm gonna miss it a lot. It's gonna be a little different playing with a new team."



Deshler's KJ Anderson and Ruthie, who is available at Florence-Lauderdale Animal Services, were all smiles after the senior's season. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

'Different environment'

Siegel prepared for move to UNA basketball

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Chloe Siegel waited patiently, holding her ticket stub. She just witnessed her former Deshler teammate, Emma Kate Tittle, put up a career high in points for the North Alabama women's team.

It might have felt a little weird for Siegel to be the fan, but she was able to swallow her pride for the moment. After the commotion subsided, the freshman walked over to Siegel, whom she had shared the court with just a year before.

It was all for nothing.

"I think she had like 23 or 24. It was a career high or something," Siegel said. "I went up to her and was like, 'Hey, can I have your autograph? You're the Emma Kate Tittle.' She was like, 'Bro, shut up. No, you can't have it.'

"So she didn't give it to me. I was upset. I was like, bruh, I want your autograph. I was gonna frame it."

Tittle's excuse after the game was a lame one. She claimed to not have a pen, though that would have been easy to find. So maybe Siegel will try again next season, when the two are teammates once again.

Or, perhaps, it will be Tittle begging Siegel for one.

"I don't know about that," Siegel said. "Depends on how I come in and play."

Chalk it up as some extra motivation for now. She's more excited to be teammates with Tittle once again. The duo led Deshler to a state championship in 2022, and Siegel signed with UNA knowing she'd only have to wait a year to share the court again.

"From the time I committed last year to now, I've just been looking forward to that," Siegel said. "I mean, I'm excited to play with her again. We did a lot of great things together last year so I think we're both excited to kind of rekindle the magic we had last year."

There's not much longer to wait. Siegel, the TimesDaily's large school All-Area girls player of the year, moved in at the end of May before the Lions' summer workouts began. She also spent



Deshler's Chloe Siegel will only be about 15 minutes away from Curry when she moves in at the University of North Alabama. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

time learning how much tougher playing in college will be.

Siegel certainly made high school look easy, though. She set the national record for career 3-pointers this season. She's a two-time Class 4A first-team All-State player, and she holds just about every scoring record there is at Deshler.

Playing in college, she professed, is going to be quite the change for her.

There's an uptick in competition — both on the team and with the opponents. For the first time in a while, she will be the freshman that has to earn time on the floor.

"Pace (in college) is different. Shot clock, everybody is good, everybody wants to be out there playing," Siegel said. "It's gonna be a very different environment."

The change in pace means having to alter the workouts. Along with getting hundreds of shots up and lifting weights, she has started running more. Sometimes it's distance and sometimes it's sprints. All the time, it's no fun.

"I hate running," Siegel said. "You gotta be a good one to run. I hate running. Don't tell (UNA) coach (Missy) Tiber that."

WRESTLING

Grappling with goals

Deshler's Jeffreys thinks outside the box to improve

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Devon Jeffreys figured a slight revamp was necessary.

Well, perhaps more than a tweak.

The Deshler wrestler had just returned from his second trip at the high school national tournament in Virginia Beach. The results against competitors from across the county had been a bit disappointing.

"Last year, I went 0-2," Jeffreys recalled. "I didn't do too good. But I always think of it like I get better every single match like I do with every tournament. I wasn't prepared as well for it last year."

So, back to the mat he went with a different perspective and some extra motivation.

Already a member at Alabama Take-down Academy in Huntsville, Jeffreys made his appearances more frequent even though he had wrestled all year round since his sophomore year. He figured he made the trip to the wrestling club "at least every other day." He also decided it was worth it to try something new.

The idea? Running multiple miles at different trails, parks and courses.

Yes, that would be cross country.

"It was awesome," said Jeffreys, who went from 170 pounds as a junior to 160.

"It was a great experience. I gained a lot of endurance and stamina from it. It helped me with my wrestling a lot."

Perhaps a new favorite sport? Not so fast, Jeffreys cautioned with a grin.

"Definitely wrestling," Jeffreys said.

"It's my go-to sport. I joined in sixth grade, seventh grade."

That was after some of his friends decided to give it a go. By the end of his high school career, it appeared to be a good decision.

The TimesDaily's wrestler of the year won the Class 1A-4A North Section tournament at 160. He followed that up with a second-place showing in the state tournament after losing a 6-4 decision to New Hope's Ricky Toney.

Jeffreys was the Tigers' ninth state finalist in the last 11 years, which



Devon Jeffreys had to leave his dog, Pugsley, at home while he headed to Virginia Beach for the high school national tournament. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

resulted in five state champions and four runner-ups.

His overall record before heading to Virginia? Only 44-4.

Not too bad.

"It was more my idea (to wrestle at 160)," Jeffreys said. "My coach was going to let me go with whatever (weight class) I wanted and that's what we decided on. He asked me if I wanted to go up to 170 at the beginning of the year, but I figured

160 was perfect.

"But there were matches that I would bump up to test myself a little bit."

Jeffreys again went 0-2 in Virginia Beach. He lost a 7-3 decision to Nick Traux from Virginia and was pinned by Shaymus MacIntosh from Massachusetts, states that take the sport a little more seriously.

"They're stout," Jeffreys said of the competition before he left. "They're

studs. They're really, really good. A lot of them come from up North where wrestling is top notch. That's what everybody goes to. Down here (in Alabama), not everybody thinks about (wrestling) too much."

So not quite the outcome, but it wasn't from a lack of preparation for Jeffreys. Or trying.

"It's a sport you just have to stick with," Jeffreys said. "And that's what I like."

Head and shoulder above

Russellville's Parrish fought through injury

By Hayden Flatt

Sports Writer

Peyton Parrish might have winced after some forehand swings this tennis season. The pain in her shoulder was nagging during every match.

Was there any chance she'd miss time? No. Slap some tape on it, maybe add some Icy Hot and she was good to go. With physical therapy placed during the few free days in the schedule.

"I was just having some bad shoulder problems," Parrish said, pointing to her right shoulder. "I kept playing through it, so that probably made it worse honestly. But I just kept pushing through."

That often made the therapist sigh. Missing some time would have sped up the recovery, but the Russellville junior never thought of that as an option.

"I told him that I was just gonna have to play no matter what," Parrish laughed. "He was like, 'OK, we'll try to make it work.' We did whatever we could."

Therapy was as painful as the matches were, but she made it through both. The on-court results didn't seem to be affected, either. Parrish finished 21-2 in singles matches, winning sectionals and reaching the Class 4A-5A state quarterfinals.

"It was a good bit (of therapy)," said Parrish, who was recently cleared from therapy. "For the whole tennis season honestly. I got hurt at the beginning and the whole time I was just going to therapy. I did a lot of dry needling and everything. But it's a lot better now."

For the TimesDaily's girls tennis player of the year, a completely healthy shoulder came at the right time. Parrish's summer tournament schedule involves multiple trips out of state and requires more vigor than her high school season.

She doesn't foresee having much time to go to any more physical therapy for a while, even with school over.

"I really never get an offseason. I feel like I'm always playing," Parrish said. "I travel all over to play tennis tournaments in the summer."

Her family — including the dogs, probably — are in it for the long haul. Her first trip was to Montgomery, and many more



Russellville's Peyton Parrish, shown with her dogs Piper and Ollie, didn't let a shoulder injury prevent her from dispatching most of the competition.

[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

will follow.

"I just got back from (Montgomery), and I go to Arkansas, Georgia," Parrish said. "All over the South."

Naturally, the competition ticks up. There aren't any classifications in the tournaments, and no school affiliations. Outside of the age limitations, there's no telling who she'll draw in a bracket. But that's part of the fun for her.

"All over (Alabama), there's a lot of

different levels. When I'm traveling, it's definitely harder than school tournaments," Parrish said. "There's a lot of good players that I get to play. I love playing those harder people because it helps me get better."

Parrish knows the challenge going into the out-of-state tournaments. Her main goal is to improve and gain experience.

Every now and then, a loss is the best way of doing that.

"Sometimes it's like kind of scary going against those players," Parrish said. "But I just remind myself that if I play those harder people, soon those people will be easier as I get better."

Perhaps that's the same feeling her opponents get. At this point, Parrish could qualify as one of "those people."

"I don't think so, honestly," Parrish said with a laugh. "I feel like I get more intimidated than them."

BOYS TENNIS

Stalking the competition

Deshler's Minshew only anticipates getting better

By Hayden Flatt
Sports Writer

Everette Minshew just wrapped up his first year of high school. On a tennis court, however, his rookie status already expired.

His opponents probably need a double take at that information. They've been dealing with the Deshler player for three years already. That makes, with presumably Minshew's best years to come, three more on varsity courts.

It only creates more excitement for the 15-year-old Minshew, who has always spent most of his time playing tennis.

"I thought I've always been pretty good at it," said Minshew shyly. He made a humble entrance at No. 2 singles as a seventh-grader before moving up to No. 1 last season.

There was no question about which court he'd play on for the Tigers as a freshman. The TimesDaily's boys tennis player of the year went 20-1 this season — undefeated until the state tournament against the eventual Class 4A-5A runner-up — and improved his overall singles high school record to 60-7.

The weekend following the state tournament, he won a tournament in Montgomery. And there will be many more to follow this summer.

The constant grind, along with running cross country in the fall and playing basketball in the winter, is the toughest part. His mental strength got tested this season as much as his physical capabilities.

"It's a lot of tennis," Minshew said. "It's really rough throughout the season. The season is long. I just kinda push through, I feel like. Get mentally there."

There's rarely a break, and he'll still at least hit around when there's a few days off between tournaments. Part of that is credited to his transition to the top court, which was tougher than he imagined at first.

"I've grown a lot since (seventh grade) mentally and physically," Minshew said. "It is a big difference going from two to one. I feel like I handled it pretty well."

"I just think the players are a lot better at No. 1," Minshew added. "The twos are really good still, but I just think one is



Everette Minshew, shown with his dog Charlene, has already played three years of varsity tennis for Deshler and still has another three to go. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

different."

Some extra motivation often comes from his mom, Alyssa, the Deshler tennis coach. That sometimes adds a wrinkle to practices and tournaments, but it isn't much different than what he's always been used to.

It gives her a bit more freedom to push Minshew whenever he needs it.

"She's always kinda been my coach at

different tournaments," Minshew said. "She's probably one of the only people that will really get on to me."

Minshew avoided most of the punishment at practice this season, but he hasn't been as lucky in previous years. He has learned his lesson, perhaps.

"She might yell, she might do different stuff," Minshew said. "I've had to run a few times in practice. ... She pushes me

really hard."

Everything is worth it if he keeps up the success while still enjoying it. And neither of those seem to be stopping anytime soon.

He said there's still room to improve, which is a bit unfortunate for those on the other side of the net.

"(This season) was fun," Minshew said. "At state, I feel like I could've done a little better."

Feeling the sting

For freshman Armstead, transition to Hatton was smooth both on, off track

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

The nerves were obvious, starting several days before she reported to her new school and lasting a few days after showing up.

Eva Armstead wasn't sure what to expect when she first walked the hallways at Hatton.

After R.A. Hubbard closed, Armstead was among a large group of Chiefs to turn into Hornets.

"There were a whole bunch of Hattin kids who knew who I was, but I didn't know them," Armstead said. "At the start of the first day of school, it was weird, but we got more comfortable as it went along."

Armstead, the TimesDaily's female track and field athlete of the year, said the transition went quickly.

"I'd stay up some nights talking about it with my parents," Armstead said. "None of the stuff I was thinking about was like that. It was very positive. I was welcomed in with open arms by everybody."

She still misses being at R.A. Hubbard, particularly a good friend who moved out of Lawrence County, but she's now a fan of the blue.

"The kids and teachers treated us like we had been there forever," Armstead said. "They didn't single us out."

The track success she had last year as an eighth-grader at Hubbard continued as a freshman at Hatton.

It was enough for Armstead to hope to make some Hatton history soon. How about next year?

"The main goal next year is

to win state in any event possible," Armstead said.

She would be the first Hatton athlete to win gold at an AHSAA outdoor meet.

"I have high standards for myself," Armstead said. "Winning state is obviously my No. 1 goal, but I also want to have a fun time and be a leader to the kids who are coming up and encourage them to run track. We had a pretty big track team, but we had more potential."

Last season at Hubbard, Armstead was the 1A champion in the 200 and runner-up in the long jump.

This year, with a move in school and a move in class (to 2A), she was second in the long jump and third in the 200.

"In the 200, the girls that I went against from Sulligent and St. Luke's," Armstead said. "They made it a better experience for me because I was terrified. I was like, 'Oh my, they're seniors. I have to run against two seniors, and I'm just a freshman.'"

"When I got (on the medal stand), they were praising me for my times. It was surprising."

Next year will almost surely be Armstead's last shot at 2A, too. Hatton is expected to jump to at least 3A, possibly higher, when the AHSAA's biennial reclassification hits takes effect next summer.

"Hatton is not huge, but it's not little, either," Armstead said. "It's kind of medium-sized. I had a lot of people to get to know. There were still kids I knew, but moving from R.A. Hubbard to Hatton, it was a big jump and a big change. There were a lot more kids around."



Hatton's Eva Armstead says it was a comfortable transition to a new school this year. Pinky agrees. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

BOYS TRACK & FIELD

Good as gold

Cooper ‘surprised’ at his place Hackleburg High history

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Daniel Cooper still never wore his medals to school.

Imagine him walking down the halls of Hackleburg High, gold draped around his neck, medals clanging to both signal his arrival and mark his place in school history.

“I didn’t want to be that guy, but everybody knows I won,” Cooper said. “That’s good enough for me.”

Being the TimesDaily’s male track and field athlete of the year was just the latest honor for Cooper.

Just call him Mr. Hackleburg High. Or valedictorian. Or the first track and field state champion in school history.

All apply.
“Doing something that nobody else has ever done in the history of the school is something that I’ll cherish forever,” Cooper said.

Cooper won the Class 1A championships in both the 100 and 200. He didn’t learn he was the first to win in school history until reading it — of course — in the TimesDaily.

“I was very surprised,” Cooper said. “There have been great athletes come through Hackleburg. Just to see that they hadn’t done that puts me ahead in a milestone.”

Cooper almost did it as a junior. In four events.

He was the 1A silver medalist in the 200 and 400. He won bronze in the 100 and long jump.

“It motivated me a lot,” Cooper said. “I didn’t want the same thing to happen as last year. I wanted to win, but it wasn’t just for me. It was for my family and my community.”

“All the work I’ve put into this, it was for everybody.”

Cooper also shined in football and basketball at Hackleburg. He fully admits basketball was his No. 3 sport.

In football, Cooper caught 75 passes for 1,137 yards and 14 touchdowns and was first-team Class 1A All-State.

“Football, all the way,” Cooper said, comparing his football to his basketball. “Toward my junior year, I felt I needed to focus more on football. It was what I wanted to do and where I had more of an



Hackleburg’s Daniel Cooper shows off his medals for an attentive and enthusiastic Salem of Florence Lauderdale Animal Services. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

opportunity.”

He did not take part in baseball, where the Panthers made the state semifinals.

“If I would have played baseball, I’d have to work on baseball instead of track,” Cooper said. “Track, as you can tell, is one of my main sports. I wanted to make

sure I ended my senior year with a state championship.”

As the summer began, he was weighing his college options.

There were four schools that had shown interest.

“I’ve got a couple of decisions to make. Track and football,” Cooper said. “It’s really about the scholarship money and how I feel when I go on a visit.”

Once he makes those decisions, he already has his next set of goals.

“Try to be the smartest guy in the classroom and the best guy on the field,” he said.

Growth spurt

Regan this year:
3 inches taller,
3 strokes lower

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

The school year had barely ended and Annalee Regan was already back on the golf course. A recent day included a quick round and a lesson from her instructor, Craig Bocking.

The rest of the summer will be much of the same — playing some tournament golf, getting instruction and continuing the never-ending quest for improving her already stout game.

Having just completed her freshman year at Muscle Shoals, Regan's game continues to trend in an upward direction. Although she just missed qualifying the AHSAA championships for a third straight year, Regan did cut three shots off her scoring average from a year ago — going from 75 to 72.

Twice this season Regan broke par in a tournament, firing 69 at Hampton Cove and 70 at Canebrake. Other highlights included a ninth-place finish in a 130-person field at Hoover Country Club and being named to four all-tournament teams.

Her progression might not be as easy as it sounds, either, as the TimesDaily girls golfer of the year continues to grow and mature. She's gotten taller — she's 5-foot-8 — and she's gotten stronger. As a result, she has had to adjust while making equipment and swing changes.

"I've grown about three inches since last year," she said. "I've had to switch clubs a lot lately and we are still kind of iffy about my shafts because I have gotten taller

and stronger. We are in that stage right now where I have to figure it all out and once I get it, it will all be good."

One of Regan's "aha" moments this season as far as how much further she is hitting the ball came during a match on the Schoolmaster course at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail at the Shoals.

On one of the par 4s, Regan's tee shot carried onto the green — a distance of about 267 yards

"I was shocked," she said. "I was like, 'Oh my gosh.' That was probably the longest drive I have ever hit."

Regan is all about her swing analytics while working with Bocking.

"I look at everything," she said. "I'm really analytical about all that stuff. I have to critique everything. I have so many swing thoughts when I am taking the club back. I don't even know what to do. I look at all that stuff and try to judge what I need to work on the most. When I hit it bad I usually know why."

Points of emphasis for Regan in the immediate future will be working to improve her short game and also to be more upbeat even when things aren't going very well on the course.

"Craig tells me I need to be more positive on the course, but I never really let my bad shots affect me," she said. "I want to improve my short game so that when I am not hitting it good, it can save me."

Remaining motivated to improve won't be a problem for Regan, who said one of her goals for her sophomore season is to win more tournaments. She loves to play.

"I could play golf all day, every day," she said. "I have to force myself to take time to chill. Golf is my life."



Muscle Shoals' Annalee Regan is often the center of attention, whether with a golf club or with her dog. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Long arm of Lawson

Haleyville star still displeased at his putter

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

A pesky afternoon rain shower delayed the inevitable at the AHSAA Class 4A boys golf championship recently, meaning Hudson Lawson had to wait to begin celebrating Haleyville's second straight team title.

Lawson, a sophomore, had just hit his tee shot on the 17th hole when the tournament was delayed for 45 minutes even though the outcome was not in doubt.

By the time he reached the 17th hole, Haleyville had expanded its team lead from a precarious eight shots after the first round to an insurmountable 22 shots with just two players left on the course.

Finally, Lawson completed the round and the celebration began. Even though Lawson didn't repeat as individual champion, he had no issue congratulating the guy who dethroned him — teammate Jake Temple. Lawson settled for second place in the individual standings, completing another strong season for the Lions.

He might not have won back-to-back individual titles, but he does repeat as the TimesDaily's boys golfer of the year. And in his eyes, the team title was more important.

"That's what I told the guys when we started," Lawson said. "Last year we had five really good players but we lost one of the best players we ever had. Last year we played with a chip on our shoulder, but this year we had a target on our back.

"Everybody knew we were the team to beat when we stepped out on the course."

Lawson finished the season with a 72.4-stroke average. He won the Viking Classic and made three other all-tournament teams in a season where he said he struggled with his putting.

"I hit it good enough to put bad and still score," he said. "When you hit 15 greens every time and shoot 70 to 73,



Haleyville's Hudson Lawson, though he said he struggled putting, had a 72.4-stroke average this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

it's not very good."

He said he put his trusty Scotty Cameron 009 putter in "timeout" trying to get his stroke turned around.

"I've been losing confidence for about five or six months," he said. "I just need to start seeing it go in at tournament time. I just struggle in tournaments."

Lawson recently switched to a Scotty Cameron button-back putter, the type used by Brooks Koepka.

"I just had to look at something new," he said.

Lawson kicked off his summer schedule with a pair of AJGA events in Huntsville and South Carolina. If he plays well in

those, it will increase his status and he'll be able to play in more. Lawson also is going to play in the Future Masters in Dothan and the AGA Boys State Junior at Goose Pond.

Almost as important, he'll be back for a junior year in which the Lions will try to make it three state titles in a row.

Goal oriented

Florence's Patterson grew to love playing soccer

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Olivia Patterson looked down at her shirt sporting a Florence soccer logo and offered a wry smile.

"Funny story," she said.

Certainly a little interesting.

Patterson, the forward who during her six-year varsity career with the Falcons became known for her goal-scoring output, initially didn't have much interest in the sport during her childhood. Other sports took up her interest instead.

"My mom played soccer all her life and I didn't want to play — at all," Patterson said with a laugh. "I first started with competitive cheer and then gymnastics and then volleyball. I did basketball for a couple of years. And then one day, I was like, 'I'll start.'"

She was 10 years old.

And her desire to play picked up once her family moved to Florence. It wasn't long before Patterson was playing any season — spring, summer, fall, winter — she should.

"That was it. None of (those sports) had the same effect as soccer," said Patterson, the TimesDaily's girls soccer player of the year. "When I started scoring goals, it was like, 'I'm pretty good at this.'"

That might be underselling it a little bit to the dismay of opposing goalkeepers.

Patterson tallied 52 goals and 26 assists the last two seasons, including 22 and 14 in 17 games this spring. Florence coach Tiffany Walker said she's averaged at least 20 goals and 15 assists per year.

There's a lot to choose from, but Patterson's favorite goal is still her first. She scored against Athens in seventh grade. Unfortunately for the Falcons, they lost 2-1.

Still, not too bad considering her mom came up as a keeper.

"No, no," Patterson laughed when asked if she ever thought about playing in net herself. "I had my dad's speed, so everyone was like it's better on the field than staying in the goal."

But high school backfields can breathe a sigh of relief. Patterson won't be spending any more time running around and



Olivia Patterson, shown with her dog Tundra, wasn't always sure about playing soccer and then she started scoring goals. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

through them. Instead, she'll now try to do that against college competition.

Patterson's freshman season at North Alabama begins this summer. Her first match will be Aug. 17 at Belmont. And some goals will certainly help the Lions. Their leading scorer last year finished

with six goals. They finished with 20 total last season.

"I think it's definitely going to be an experience," Patterson said. "I feel like it's going to be a little bit different than high school, but I'm looking forward to it. I'm excited about it."

But first, she'll have a few more summer games with her Huntsville-based team. Soccer is always happening. Funny story.

"I just love playing it," Patterson said. "You don't think about anything else. It's really easy to get into it and play hard."

BOYS SOCCER

Surf's up

Muscle Shoals' Weeks has more talent than soccer

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Hezekiah Weeks is getting ready for a summer that's set to feature some fun in the sun. Well, sort of.

The Muscle Shoals junior will be spending some time traveling around Florida. Not so much for some of the amusement parks or attractions that might draw other people to the state. Instead, it will be more business related. Attending various soccer camps and taking some school visits.

Soccer is, after all, never ending.

"They're super competitive," Weeks said of the camps. "Especially with it in Florida, it's international. I'll be playing with kids from like Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, everywhere. I think the competition is going to be tough, but it's good to be out there and learn from them and maybe show them a thing or two.

"I think it's good to play people who might be better than you and then you can build up to them."

And when he's not attempting to pick up a move or two? Weeks might use some down time to head down to the beach with a board tucked under his arm to get back into one of his other favorite pastimes.

Surf's up, anyone?

"Learned to surf (growing up) in South Florida," Weeks said. "(My) old man taught me. We've always been a real beachy and soccer family. Surfing is something I love to do and find it very relaxing. It allows you to forget about soccer sometimes when you need to."



Muscle Shoals' Hezekiah Weeks, shown with Salem from Florence Lauderdale Animal Services, learned to enjoy soccer and surfing as a kid. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

It might also be a good reward for the TimesDaily's boys soccer player of the year after he helped the Trojans secure their first playoff berth since 2002.

And yes, Weeks said, surfing is as difficult as it looks. Best to start young.

"I probably was in diapers when I first got thrown on a board," Weeks said with a smile.

"There's videos of me wiping out and getting right back up there and trying again. I guess that's always a thing to do. You mess up once, get right back to it. That's kind of how I relate to everything I do."

Weeks doesn't have any particular place he'd like to try catching some waves. Florida, however, especially around Fort

Lauderdale and Jupiter, remain some of his favorites. A little nostalgia mixed with a little bit of experience.

The quality of the surf there doesn't hurt, either.

"It's warm water, not freezing cold, and there's always a wave to surf no matter the day," Weeks said. "And when it's hurricane season, the waves

get even bigger. It's pretty exciting."

Fun in the sun it is, then.

"That's a big thing about going to Florida is I not only want to play there, but surf there, too," Weeks said. "My goal is to be somewhere where I can get to the ocean and cool down from everything if I need to. Have some fun."

Purple purpose

Loretto's Dover adapting to UNA college future

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

The change started washing over Briley Dover about Christmas.

It was a consistent theme in her holiday presents, despite how it ranked — and still ranks — as anathema in and around Loretto.

Avoided almost at all costs and feared to cause rash and sickness and much consternation among many a Mustang, Dover soon found it wasn't so bad after all.

Purple, she soon decided, was an acceptable sartorial choice.

"It was kind of hard at first, but I've grown to love it," said Dover, the Times-Daily's large school softball player of the year.

"I think it's a good color."

My, how quickly things can change.

All it took for Dover to overcome any misgivings about purple — a primary color of Loretto arch-nemesis Lawrence County — was her signature.

She's a North Alabama signee.

Her conversion to a pro-purple mindset, at least where it doesn't concern those dastardly Wildcats, started in November when she signed.

"As soon as I committed to UNA, I started getting some purple stuff, some UNA stuff," Dover said. "I did start wearing it at school. Since UNA is close, a lot of people wear UNA stuff anyway."

Those shopping for Dover's Christmas presents suddenly had an opening.

Her purple wardrobe ballooned. Maybe Prince's classic song started echoing in her mind. She now possibly has everything she needs in purple, except a purple bat.

"No, not yet," Dover said. "We may need to get that in the works."

Dover is now loud and proud of her purple, from the time she's around Loretto to her job at Preston's Restaurant in Lexington. Well, that pride may not extend northward. Don't look for her to wear it in Lawrenceburg.

"No, not really. No," Dover said. "I don't think people would say stuff, but



Briley Dover will soon turn in her black and gold Loretto gear for some purple and gold at UNA. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

you never know."

Wearing black and gold, Dover had another big year for Loretto, as in a .585 average, 41 RBIs and 50 runs scored. In 35 games. The shortstop had 34 extra-base hits, including eight home runs, and was 33-of-33 on steals.

"I feel like I did pretty good at the plate and in the field," Dover said. "Maybe I didn't hit as many home runs as I would have liked, but as far as everything, I felt I had a good, solid season."

But there was one category where she had a big, fat zero.

Tsk, tsk.

"Yes, zero strikeouts," Dover said.

"There were a couple of times I knew in the back of my head, especially at the end of the season, that I knew I had no strikeouts. I'd have two strikes and think, 'Oh, crap.' I would shorten up and try to just get a hit rather than hit the ball out of the park."

She said her parents and grandmother were acutely aware of her absence of whiffs, at least when her mom actually reached the end of a game.

Dover's last strikeout? Last summer ... she thinks.

"I don't remember," Dover said. "I took a lot of pride into putting the ball in play. When you do that, good stuff will

happen."

Without memory of her last strikeout, Dover has the memory of a late-season "highlight" involving her mother. Jamie, a Loretto assistant coach, didn't witness the final play of a rainy postseason game, ejected for arguing field conditions.

So, Jamie had more ejections (one) than Briley had strikeouts.

"It was hilarious," Dover said. "I was kind of mad in the moment, but it was really funny afterward. In the moment, I wasn't laughing."

"When we got in the car, we started talking about it and we busted out laughing the whole way home."

Wright's might

Mars Hill catcher finds homer groove as senior

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Maybe Emma Kate Wright's catching gear has a future after all.

After five years of knee-crunching crouches and pitch-blocking shifts, after five years of donning the gear playfully known as the "tools of ignorance," Wright has almost no use for the shin guards, chest protector and mask anymore.

Except maybe to hang on a wall. As decoration.

"I probably will just for the memories," Wright said.

The Mars Hill senior, the TimesDaily's small school softball player of the year, has invested so much time behind the plate.

But she's also finished with the position.

Wright has signed with North Alabama, where the Lions see her wearing less gear and enjoying lower temperatures.

"I had to catch at Mars Hill, but it wasn't really my primary position," Wright said. "It was a 'I went where I was needed' type of thing, but I really enjoy playing outfield and infield, and that's what I was recruited for, as utility."

When catching was first broached, when Wright was in middle school, she was eager for the opportunity.

"I wasn't opposed to it because I figured I could do it, but I figured out pretty quick that it was harder than it seemed," Wright said. "I got used to it and it was fine."

Five years later, what started in her mind as almost an afterthought actually coaxed emotions. The Panthers were already mourning the end of their



Mars Hill's Emma Kate Wright swung a mean bat this year, but she isn't mean when it comes to Josie. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

season when Wright realized her catching gear was reaching the end of the line.

"That kind of hit me hard," she said. "When I was putting it in my bag for the last time, that made me upset."

While her catching gear may be retired, Wright is just getting started — and hopes her success

as a Mars Hill senior continues when wearing purple and gold.

After clubbing just four home runs as a junior, when the Panthers were the Class 2A runners-up, she powered 14 this year, helping Mars Hill finish third in Class 3A.

There was no secret recipe, no Barry Bonds-ian stew that led to

her power surge.

Signing with UNA softball way back in November, when her basketball season was just getting started, had its benefits.

"There was kind of a weight lifted off my shoulders when I had finally committed and knew where was going," Wright said. "I could play ball and not worry

about where I was going or who was watching. It felt good."

The ink she left on her letter of intent signaled a new start. By the spring, Wright delivered. Over and over again.

"It was surreal," Wright said. "It didn't feel real that I was actually signing to play at a college. All that hard work had paid off."

Small ball

For Edwards, the choice is baseball over hoops

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Miles Edwards' face scrunches. A small sigh follows.

The posed question requires a little bit of thought, and not one to blurted out with a careless answer.

Would Edwards, Lauderdale County's star basketball and baseball player, rather hit a game-winning shot at the buzzer or come through with a walk-off hit? Decisions, decisions.

"That one's tough," Edwards said. "My baseball players are going to be mad, but I'm going to say buzzer-beater. It's a little more loud in a gym than a ballpark, so I'm going to take the buzzer-beater."

It sounds like some interesting conversations will need to be had. But for those who share a dugout with Edwards, there's no need to fret. While he may feel one way about certain situations, his choice of a favorite sport remains firmly entrenched. There's no need to think much about this one.

Batter up, then.

"I'm taking baseball," Edwards said. "All day. I've always loved baseball, since I was 5 (years old). I love it more than anything else I do."

It's a strong choice. And it appears others would agree with the Times-Daily's All-Area small school baseball player of the year.

On Saturday, Edwards was named the Class 3A player of the year by the Alabama Sports Writers Association. The Tigers' last boys state player of the year was Cody Gross in 1991. That was in football.

"I put in a lot of extra hours last summer," Edwards said. "And to be able to (pitch and hit), some guys can do one thing and one thing only. I like to be able to do it all and take a lot of pride in being able to do everything to the best of my ability."

And while Edwards likes to make



Lauderdale County's Miles Edwards had a major season that even impressed Major, his German shepherd. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

sure he's putting in some extra work, he'll also take some time to watch some former and current major league players. Maybe pick up an idea or two.

"I like watching Trea Turner," Edwards said. "Just the way he plays the game. He's fast, he fields well and he shows you don't have to be a big guy to hit it a long way."

That would be Phillies shortstop Trea Turner. But is it cool for a Braves fan

such as Edwards, who still has Chipper Jones listed as his favorite player, to enjoy watching a divisional opponent?

Edwards will still seek out Jones' highlights on YouTube.

"Funny you should ask that," Edwards said with a grin. "We went to a Braves game (recently) and they were playing the Phillies. Every time Bryce Harper got up (to bat) or Trae Turner got up there, it was all boos. I might have been the only

Braves fan who wasn't booing."

Although, he did add a caveat that the Braves will win the World Series for the second time in three seasons.

"No doubt."

Just like the spring season Edwards put together.

Sorry, basketball.

"My goal is to get to the next level," Edwards said. "I want to keep playing until I can't play anymore."

Teed up

For Porter, pregame work helped build massive year

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Caden Porter had his routine. It didn't pay to deviate from it, either.

The Loretto slugger would arrive at the ballfield an hour before game time, lace up his cleats and put on some batting gloves. He'd then bring one of the simplest hitting tools out to home plate, the one used to first teach about making solid contact — a tee.

"Every day I'd go hit four buckets of balls off a tee to make sure I was seeing the ball right," Porter said. "Once you do that, you do see the ball better. And then once you get into the (batter's) box, you just feel good about hitting."

Each bucket contained 40 to 50 baseballs, he estimated. Porter would start by setting the tee up high. Low was next, followed by setting it up inside and the outside. He also had someone throw batting practice to him. He'd hit those baseballs, too.

In all, the circuit took about 45 minutes to complete.

"I started this past summer before high school ball started," said Porter, who picked up the idea after watching batting practice while attending a major league game. "I figured since it was going to be my last season, I wanted to go out with a bang. I really got in there and started swinging to make sure I was going to play good this year."

Porter certainly accomplished his going out with a bang goal. Even if the pun wasn't intended.



Loretto's Caden Porter says working off a tee in pregame helped lead to his massive season for the Mustangs. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

The senior racked up 10 home runs, five of which were grand slams. But the TimesDaily All-Area large school baseball player of the year saved some of his best shots for the Mustangs' postseason trip, much to the consternation of Fairview. Three home runs, two of which were grand slams, in one afternoon will do that.

"It really caught me by surprise when I hit those five grand slams (this season)," Porter

said. "And when I hit those three home runs in a game, I was like, 'Wow.' It was just disbelief."

So, might someone with an affinity for hitting the long ball such as Porter have any advice for those looking to do the same?

Of course he does.

"Make sure to use your tee and to take batting practice seriously," Porter said matter of factly.

That simple?

"Yes," Porter said. "It's hard and you might get frustrated. But if you keep swinging, it'll come."

Not too bad for a player who considered himself better in another sport before the season began. Establishing a routine can sometimes help.

Tee time, anyone?

"Before this season, I was always a big football guy," Porter said with a laugh. "I love

football. If you get mad, you'd be fine because there's the next play. If you strike out and get mad (in baseball), you have to wait nine batters."

In football, where you may get the ball on the next snap, Porter ran for 1,324 yards and 22 touchdowns.

Imagine if batting again right away was possible in baseball.

"When I hit those 10 home runs," Porter said, "I was like, 'Maybe I am a baseball guy.'"

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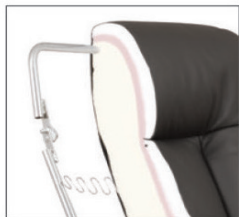
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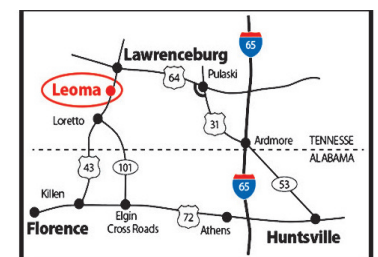
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