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## County, local insurance company await court ruling in insurance coverage lawsuit

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Through a lawsuit filed in 2020, the Franklin County Commission is asking

Franklin County Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton to rule as a matter of law that a local insurance company is legally responsible to pay damages resulting from the theft of more than \$750,000 in county funds by former Franklin County Administrator Crista Madden.

The civil action against Sinclair Lawrence & Associates, Inc., and

Debbie Thorn was filed June 1, 2020, in Franklin County Circuit Court by Montgomery attorney Edward P. Kendall of Strickland & Kendall, LLC, and Franklin County Attorney Roger Bedford, Jr.

This is the second time the county has sued Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn, the first having been filed in 2019 in the United States District Court, Northern District of Alabama. That lawsuit was dismissed by the court and the state action was filed the following year.

The claim centers around financial losses Franklin County incurred from

See 'LAWSUIT,' Page 9

## Lawson: RHS softball 'can and will' reach standard of excellence

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

As a native of northeast Mississippi, Rick Lawson is quite familiar with Russellville High School's winning tradition.

And as Russellville's new varsity softball coach, Lawson believes there's no reason his program can't establish itself as a powerhouse alongside the school's baseball, football and soccer programs.


"With the caliber of athletes we have in school, I think we can achieve success right off the bat," Lawson said. "As a 5A school the size of Russellville, there's no reason we can't attain success and play each year at a very high level."

Lawson's hiring was approved by the Russellville City Board of Education at its July 18th meeting. He will work in the Russellville Parks and Recreation Department along with his softball coaching duties.

"By working at the Parks and Recreation Department, it's a great opportunity to move this program in the direction we all talked about wanting to go," Lawson said. "There's an established winning tradition at Russellville High School in other sports and the softball program can and will get to that standard of excellence as well."

Lawson comes to the 'Ville from Meridian Community College in Meridian, Miss., where he served as assistant softball coach last season.

See 'LAWSON,' Page 5

  
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Terry Joe Pinkard, age 62, of Russellville, passed away on Wednesday, July 26, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Lyndon Price, age 58, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, July 27, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Candelaria Andres, age 47, passed away on Thursday, July 27, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Barbara Willingham Campbell, age 72, of Russellville, passed away July 28, 2023. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the family.



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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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**Letter to Editor: Franklin County, We Can Do Better. We Must.**

Dear Editor:

Franklin County has finally secured its future with reliable affordable last mile fiber optic future-proof broadband now being built out by Freedom Fiber.

We must now ask if our beautiful county has the proactive transparent leadership it needs to become the Franklin County we all want. Not one a very few individuals or elected officials want for themselves.

Franklin County had a huge wake up call last summer when the Franklin Land Management Company proposed a massive expansion for a county-killing multi-state municipal waste landfill located in the middle of water sources near Belgreen.

Proudly, county residents rose up and said "NO!" and the landfill application was withdrawn before a commission vote could be held.

Since his strategic withdrawal, Neil Hargett, owner of the Franklin Land Management Company, has repeatedly said he has a "Plan B." He's not listening to his neighbors.

Its likely Mr. Hargett and his cronies will attempt to persuade the current county commission or a newly elected 2025 county commission to vote for their county-killing multi-state municipal waste landfill. Regardless of how or when, they will try again.

Also, this county commission never apologized for threatening our homes and county when they tried to slip this disastrous landfill past us with little transparency.

Their action also exposed their across-the-board lack of transparency, leaving the impression they think little of their fellow county residents.

Franklin County, we can do better in a county commission. We must.

First, we need new county commission and probate judge candidates.

It's refreshing to already see a candidate challenging the current probate judge but we also need additional committed county residents to stand up now and run for office.

If you oppose a disastrous landfill in your county, if you want a transparent and proactive local government or if you tell yourself it will never change - then be the change you want.

Stand up, run for office - for your family, neighbors and county. What would Jesus do?

Next, all candidates running for these offices must commit to the following five items. No commitment to these, no votes for you. No political double speak, no exceptions.

If elected, candidates will not support or vote for any massive expansion for a county-killing multi-state municipal waste landfill located in Franklin County.

If elected, candidates will ensure the commission moves all its public meetings to no earlier than 6 PM on weekdays, when Franklin County citizens might actually be able to attend their commission's meetings.

If elected, candidates will ensure the commission live-stream all its public meetings and keep them available for county residents to watch and refer back to. After all, we're finally getting broadband.

If elected, candidates will ensure the commission post their meeting agendas in advance of all meetings; any meeting agenda changes or additions must be posted 24 business hours in advance; and post the commission's meeting minutes and supporting documents within days of holding the meeting, not weeks, all on a very user-friendly website citizens can easily access and download from quickly. After all, we're finally getting broadband.

If elected, candidates will ensure the commission creates, maintains, regularly reports on and updates a Five Year Strategic Plan - one that informs all county residents on our county's direction, one all county residents will have input on before projects start.

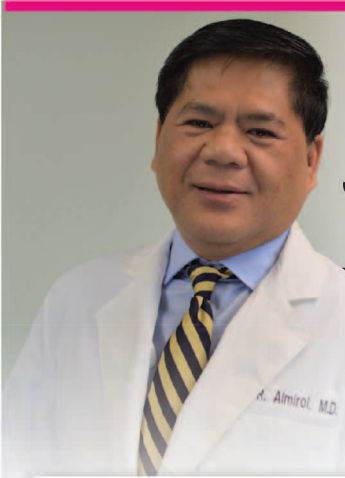
Think about it. If a Five Year Strategic Plan was implemented years ago, couldn't we have had: a) reliable affordable last mile fiber optic future-proof broadband sooner?; b) a county Animal Rescue and Shelter and enforceable animal control laws without two tragic dog mauling deaths and the resulting lawsuits? and; c) a funded timeline for fixing and paving all the county roads our neighbors have been begging for?

And, if the commission really thought the county needed a new landfill immediately (it doesn't), wouldn't such a strategic process to include a county review, study and assessment with lots of public input and plenty of time to consider all the critical aspects of such a once-in-a-lifetime no-turning-back decision be the proper way to decide on such a need? Not last summer's process sprung on us last minute?

Broadband and our county's bright future is coming very soon. It includes good sustainable economical development, including recreational economical development. It includes our children staying in the county after graduating and those who left returning home. A county-killing multi-state municipal waste landfill is not economic development. It's a time bomb that explodes on our future generations.

We can do better Franklin County. We must. It will take new county leadership. Stand up and be that leadership, be that change.

Scott Mugno,  
Russellville



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# Grimes appointed to CLAS Board of Directors

*Submitted*

The Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) is pleased to announce the selection of Heath Grimes, Superintendent of Russellville City Schools, to serve on the esteemed CLAS Board of Directors as the President of the School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA).

Grimes joins a distinguished group of educational leaders who are dedicated to advancing excellence in leadership and promoting positive change in Alabama schools.

Affiliate presidents play a vital role in CLAS by representing and advocating for the unique needs and interests of their affiliate organizations. These dedicated leaders bring their extensive knowledge and experience to the CLAS Board of Directors, ensuring that the collective voice of Alabama's educational leaders is heard and amplified.

In their role as a non-voting member of the CLAS Board of Directors, affiliate presidents provide valuable insights, perspective, and expertise to inform the board's discussions and decisions. Their contributions will help shape the strategic initiatives, programs, and resources developed by CLAS to empower educational leaders across the state.

Reflecting on the appointment of Dr. Heath Grimes, Dr. Vic Wilson, Executive Director for the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS), expressed his enthusiasm.

"We are honored to welcome Dr. Grimes as president of SSA to the CLAS Board of Directors. The leadership of our affiliate presidents within their affiliate organization brings a unique perspective that will greatly benefit our collective efforts to support and empower educational leaders in Alabama. We look forward to their valuable contributions and collaboration," Wilson said.

Grimes joins a diverse group of educational leaders who are passionate about collaboration, innovation, and educational equity. Their leadership and guidance will undoubtedly make a significant impact on their affiliate organization and contribute to the overall mission of CLAS.

About CLAS

CLAS, the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools, was founded in 1969 by a small group of school leaders to provide targeted professional learning and support for Alabama's public school administrators. CLAS now serves twelve affiliates representing each type of public school/school system leader. CLAS provides the framework to connect dedicated school administrators and other successful leaders with a network for professional growth and support. CLAS is the premier professional learning provider for administrators in public schools in the state of Alabama.



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# 'LAWSON,' From Page 1

Lawson also coached three years as a softball assistant at Itawamba Community College in Fulton, Miss., from 2019-2022.

He was promoted at Itawamba to Recruiting Coordinator and Camp Director in addition to his coaching position.

Lawson was part of the coaching staff at Tishomingo County High School the season the school won Mississippi's North State Championship in fast-pitch softball.

The combination of coming back closer to home and the opportunity to lead and develop his own program was attractive enough for Lawson to leave a college job where he was obviously very successful.

"This puts me back home is one thing it does," Lawson told the FFP Friday. "I grew up in Corinth and went to high school in Alcorn County. My two brothers live in Tishomingo County and my youngest son attends college and works in Athens. This job appealed to me for several reasons, including the opportunity to get closer to home and my children and grandchildren," he added.

Lawson brings with him a road map to build the Golden Tigers' softball program, starting at the ground level, in the Parks and Recreation youth leagues.

"I talked with the superintendent and Coach Ritter about this. In order to get our program back to where we want it to be, we'll depend on some of the younger students in the community. I'll be working in the Parks and Recreation Department and we need to get girls to develop the love of the game at a young age as they continue to develop their skills moving forward," Lawson said.

"I'll stress fundamentals. Pitching is an area of focus and one of my coaching strengths. It all starts inside that circle," Lawson said.

Lawson is in the process of moving to Russellville and will begin his new job August 1st.

"I'll be working closely with Mr. (Donnie) Flanagan, the Parks and Recreation Director. We met and talked about how to achieve that vision of getting younger players started in youth leagues and teaching the fundamentals of softball and developing their love of the game at an early age," Lawson said.

"Then when they get into the junior high program and high school program, we won't have to spend a ton of time teaching those basics. That will allow us to work on more advanced aspects of the game," he added.



COURTESY PHOTO

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# Inmates' escape from work release a short-lived respite

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Two Franklin County Jail inmates who were part of a group of four doing community service work at Russellville High School Saturday now find themselves facing two new felony offenses after allegedly stealing a Russellville City Schools vehicle and escaping from custody.

James Alan Wayteck, 27, and Robert Rivera, 24, are charged with escaping from custody early Saturday afternoon.

The inmates were transported to the high school to work on edging and weed eating a parking lot set to be restriped this week in advance of the new school year.

Wayteck and Rivera, according to Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver, stole a truck used by Russellville City Schools maintenance personnel around campus and fled the scene.

As Oliver and sheriff's investigators were preparing a news

release and social media post to alert the public to watch for the inmates, his department received a call from an anonymous citizen reporting the inmates' location at a house in Red Bay.

"We don't know who that citizen was but we certainly appreciate them coming forward," Oliver said.

A deputy responding to that location observed the inmates driving the truck, which authorities did not yet know was stolen, and began pursuing them. The chase carried over into Itawamba County, Miss., before the inmates lost control of the truck and ran off the road.

They were then taken into custody and returned to the Franklin County Jail.

The two men, both of whom were in court-ordered custody for non-violent offenses, Oliver said, now face Theft of Property First Degree, a Class B felony punishable by 2-20 years in prison upon conviction, and Escape From Custody, a Class C felony that carries a 1-10 year sentence upon conviction.

The inmates were trustees at the jail, meaning they had more freedom of movement around the facility and are called on to do different tasks including assisting with serving meals, cleaning, etc.

Inmates who work on community service details must not be facing violent offenses, nor have violent prior convictions. The four inmates who worked at RHS Saturday volunteered for the community service work, Oliver said.

Oliver said inmate work details are used to help schools, at public events or for local municipalities.

"There is rarely any trouble with them leaving to work, but when they do something like this, it makes you not want to trust others," Oliver said. "It's frustrating but the good thing is they didn't hurt anybody and they weren't gone very long."

The inmates' status in the Franklin County Jail is now changed due to the escape charge and Oliver said they would remain in lockdown.

Although they were outside the jail at the time they escaped, Alabama law still classifies work release inmates as 'in custody,' although the charge of escaping from a jail or prison directly is more serious.

## Alabamian Updating Citizenship Status


Under the Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act, a request was submitted to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security via U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services National Records Center, file number NR C202314936 on May 10, 2023, regarding the birth certificate of Charles E. Hosea, Jr., I-94, and citizenship status of Charles E. Hosea Jr., Hosea Jr., Charles E., Charles Hosea Jr. and all other derivatives. A completed search of Person-Centric Identity Services was conducted and there were no records responsive to the request.


Section 302 of Public Law 94-241: I Charles E. Hosea Jr., being duly sworn, hereby declare my intention to be a national but not a citizen of the United States. "Non citizen National."


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 **A**shaKiran serves victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking across Alabama. Their vision is to be a 'ray of hope' by bridging the gap between service providers and culturally diverse communities. Their 24-hour crisis line number is 1-800-793-3010. Learn more about AshaKiran by visiting [www.ashakiranonline.org](http://www.ashakiranonline.org). Consultations are free and confidential, and available in 45 different languages.


 **T**he Senior Center of Phil Campbell is under new management. Everyone age 60 and over are invited to come join us and be part of the group. This is for men and women. We meet at the Phil Campbell Community Center Monday thru Friday from 8-noon. A delicious lunch is served at 11 a.m. Meals are \$1 donation. Some come and play Rook. We also do Bingo when we have enough people. There are several games to play or just sit and socialize with other seniors.


 **T**he Annual Ladies Conference will be held Saturday, August 12, from 10a.m.-2 p.m., at Phil Campbell First Baptist Church Fellowship Hall. Featured speaker will be Alison Blackwood, former Missionary to China and Venezuela. Special music by the Branches Praise Team. Bring your favorite salad to share for lunch. Sponsored by Franklin Baptist Association WMU & Women's Ministry

 **L**ifeSouth Community Blood Center will host a blood drive at Russellville Hospital on THURSDAY, AUGUST 10TH, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.. LifeSouth is the primary supplier of blood products to Russellville Hospital. Please contact Deborah Lindsey to schedule an appointment at 256-332-8676 or by email at [deborah.lindsey@russellville-hospital.org](mailto:deborah.lindsey@russellville-hospital.org). Please be sure to bring your photo ID when you donate. Everyone who signs up to donate will receive a free T-shirt, an appetizer card from Texas Roadhouse, a free cookie dough card from Papa Murphy's and a free meal ticket from Russellville Hospital. All donors will receive a free cholesterol screening. We will also be giving away DOOR PRIZES!

 **P**astor Bro. Eric McKinney and the congregation of Crestview Missionary Baptist Church, 24131 Hwy. 24, Russellville, invite you to worship with them. Sunday morning Bible Study is from 10-Noon and Sunday morning worship from 11-Noon. All are welcome to our services! Call 256-324-0179 for more information.

 **A** free Basic Computer Training #101 Course will be offered August 16 and 17 at the Chucky Mullins Center, 814 Hamilton St., in Russellville. The class is from 1:00-2:30 p.m., August 16 and 10a.m.-Noon on August 17. Registration is required to attend. To register or learn more about the program, call 256-320-8051 or email [oppia.burke@aamu.edu](mailto:oppia.burke@aamu.edu). The course is offered by Alabama A&M University Small Farms Research Center in collaboration with Fort Valley State University. Learn the basics of working a computer. Computers are available on site. Don't worry if you've never used a computer. We can help!

 **J**onesboro Baptist Church will host its Homecoming on Sunday, August 13. Morning service begins at 11 a.m. Lunch served after service. At 1:30 p.m., there will be a special guest singing with the Ransomed Pilgrims. The church is located at 5061 Waterloo Road in Russellville. Pastor Kent Walker and congregation invite everyone to attend.

 **M**y Father's House Church will host Friends and Family Day, August 6, 2023. No Sunday School that morning. Sunday morning service will start at 10:30 a.m. Dinner immediately after service. Special singing and preaching. Everyone is invited. For information or a ride, please call 256-460-1376,

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## Rockin' the Roxy: Great Pretenders show part of W.C. Handy Week

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The event is called 'The Great Pretenders,' but there was nothing pretend about the talent on display at the W.C. Handy Festival's "Evening at the Roxy," held July 27th in downtown Russellville.

Hosted by the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, the annual event is Russellville's one entry into the W.C. Handy Festival pool. The show features local folks performing the hits of their favorite musicians. Some singers dressed in character, some didn't.

But this year's show saw several new performers and a talent level more than worthy of the admission price.

The night of music began with a 30-minute 'show before the show' from Still Here Gospel Group (Rev. Johnnie Smith, Bryant Bonds, William Nelson, Frankie Hubbard, Eric Goodloe, Willie Buchanan, Joel Franks and Larry Freeman). This year's show was in memory of Rev. William Freeman, Bro. Jack Freeman and Bro. Wash Bates.



COURTESY PHOTO

Kinfolk performs a Fleetwood Mac hit at the Roxy's Great Pretenders.

The arsenal of musical talent included first-time performers Terry Benton, who sang Johnny Cash's hit Folsom Prison Blues, Chris Williams (Blues Man by Hank Williams, Jr.), Kinfolk Trio of Mike Rice, Sera Rice and Kassidy McCorkle (The Chain by Fleetwood Mac) and Garrett Booth, who sang If I Can't Love Her from Beauty and the Beast.

Other performers included Aleya Lane, Kandi Parker, Lucas Shepherd, Meletha Walker, Mazie Vandiver, Jeff Allen, Keylee Mayfield, Caroline Sparks, Mary Lindley, Ariel Cothrum, Sydney Medley, Dana Hill, Buford Parker and Gunner Lane.

Lane closed out the show singing Elton John's Your Song as he walked up and down the aisles and serenaded some of the ladies in the audience.

Gold level sponsors for this year's Great Pretenders included: Bank Independent, Clark Pulley, Russellville Water and Sewer Board, CB&S Bank, First Metro Bank, Valley State Bank, Community Spirit Bank, Mayor David Grissom and Alabama Central Credit Union.

Silver level sponsors included: Sinclair-Lawrence & Associates, Wood-Thompson Insurance, Green's Dependable Hardware, Bedford, Rogers, Bowling & McReynolds, P.C., Jamie Sumerel, Russellville Florist & Gifts/Chase Sparks, Strickland & Barksdale, CPA and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce.

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# 'LAWSUIT,' From Page 1

2008 through 2017 as a result of Madden's theft from the county's general fund, Gas Tax Fund and Solid Waste Fund. Madden pled guilty to felony charges and admitted stealing \$753,889.21 in county funds.

The court ordered Madden to pay restitution to the county and two insurance companies that paid on the county's theft claim. That included \$553,889.21 to Franklin County, \$100,000 to State Farm Fire & Casualty, \$100,000 to Berkley Southeast Insurance and \$2,000 to Randy Thigpen. The total restitution ordered was \$838,559.53.

As of July 26, 2023, \$232,151.68 has been paid back, leaving a balance of \$606,407.85. Madden has made regular monthly payments ranging from \$200-\$450 since 2022. She remains in custody of the Alabama Department of Corrections.

From April 1, 2006 through April 1, 2015, the county was insured through Sinclair Lawrence. Some time that year, the county changed insurance providers. In 2018, the county filed a claim for losses from the Madden theft and received a denial letter from Lafayette Insurance (the provider that wrote the policy through Sinclair Lawrence). The denial was based on the claim falling outside of the policy coverage period.

According to Bedford, Thorn recommended the county switch coverages but failed to advise them to purchase 'tail coverage' when doing so.

Tail coverage is a type of insurance that extends coverage for incidents that happen during the time the policy was active but are not filed until after the policy has expired.

"The Franklin County Commission had a long-term relationship with Thorn and Sinclair-Lawrence...more than a 10-year relationship as the sole insurance agent for Franklin County," the motion reads.

The county's complaint asserts that as an exclusive vendor, Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn owed Franklin County a duty to inform them if they changed coverage and chose a certain option that the county needed to purchase tail coverage.

When county officials filed their claim, they learned for the first time on June 4, 2018, that "Thorn had not provided adequate insurance to give the

Franklin County Commission employee theft coverage tail coverage," according to the motion.

The complaint alleges the defendants were negligent and/or wanton, and fraudulent in suppressing necessary facts they were required to inform county officials about.

A motion for summary judgment is a pleading that asks a court, as a matter of law, to rule in one party's favor based on the law, when applied to the facts, leading the court to only one conclusion—that the party is entitled to the relief sought.

"The county fully believes they are in the right and the law supports their position," Bedford said.

As with every lawsuit, though, there are two sides, and attorneys for Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn provide a much different version of the facts and the applicable law.

Natalie A. Daugherty, with the Mobile firm of Galloway, Johnson, Tompkins, Burr & Smith, filed a brief in support of the opposition to summary judgment. She maintains the county's claims of fraud and/or negligence are barred by the statute of limitations and/or contributory negligence on the plaintiff's part.

Sinclair Lawrence's motion states several of the county's allegations are 'undisputedly untrue,' including the county's claim that Sinclair Lawrence was the sole insurance agent for the county and that Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn were 'constantly in contact' with the commission and that Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn were 'solely responsible in determining the best type of insurance to purchase and provide' for the commission.

In support of its response that asks the Court to deny the county's motion for summary judgment, Sinclair Lawrence submitted affidavits from county officials it alleges were 'inconsistent' with deposition testimony.

Additionally, the defendants argue, the county has the ultimate responsibility for purchasing adequate insurance to protect the county's property, and that Alabama law requires a county to insure county property against loss by fire or theft, as well as liability for damage to persons or property.

The defendants' other primary argument is that the first lawsuit was dismissed due to the statute of limitations to bring the claim having expired. The defendants argue the commission changed the date of accrual of the claim to be June 4, 2018, when it received a letter from Lafayette denying coverage, when in fact the commission 'was notified of the cancellation of the Lafayette policy in 2015.'

Last November, Hamilton ordered the case to mediation, a process where both parties meet with an impartial mediator in an effort to resolve the case without the necessity of trial.

According to a source familiar with the mediation, Sinclair Lawrence and Thorn's attorneys did not offer any dollar amount as a settlement proposal. Instead, they held the position that the plaintiff's lawsuit is time-barred and meritless and won't survive to trial.

Now the parties await the Court's ruling, which will determine the lawsuit's next step, which could be a judgment in one party's favor, an order setting the case for trial or an appeal from either party of the court's ruling.

The Franklin Free Press contacted local parties involved in the case, each of whom declined comment and referred the matter to their attorney.

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## Phil Campbell All Stars finish fifth at Dixie Youth World Series in Louisiana

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When you look at the big picture, the Phil Campbell Dixie Youth Baseball 12 and Under All Stars finishing fifth in last week's World Series was an amazing accomplishment. It will take a few days, though, for Coach Brian Scott and his team to think about the 'big picture' after Phil Campbell was eliminated Sunday with a 10-3 loss to the Florida All Stars.

Phil Campbell did not lose a game as it marched through the Dixie Youth Sub-District, District and Alabama State Championship tournaments. The team's confidence was high, as was their coach's expectations, as they began play in the 10-team tournament July 28th.

After losing a practice game Thursday to Texas, bracket play began Friday as Phil Campbell met the Georgia Wrens All Stars. Ty Hamilton's three-inning stint on the mound earned him the victory, as he gave up only one hit, two runs, two walks with four strikeouts. Eli Baker earned the save with 2.1 innings of three-hit, no earned run pitching. Kruz Cochran started the game and did not give up a hit or run in his 1.2 innings of work. Phil Campbell led 5-0 after three innings. In the four-run third, Noah Miller led off with a double, followed by a walk to Jacob Potter. Miller was caught stealing at third for the first out.

See, 'ALL-STARS,' page 13

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## Triple trouble: Trio of former Golden Tigers on coach Brent Dearmon's UNA team

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Golden Tiger football program has a history of producing many college players and even a few in the National Football League. This season at the University of North Alabama, there will be three former Russellville players on roster including Ashaad Williams, Nathan Brockway and Edgar Amaya.

Amaya is a transfer from the University of Colorado.

"After my head coach at Colorado was let go, UNA hired

Brent Dearman and we go way back to high school. He recruited me to go to Kansas when Les Miles was the head coach. We have a great bond and the college is in my backyard and close to family," Amaya said.

Amaya was red shirted his first season at Colorado. He received a medical redshirt his second season after tearing his achilles tendon before week one.

After two years of waiting, Amaya is ready to start on the offensive line and contribute.

"I'm ready to get back to the basics and winning most of all. I want to get UNA back to the win-

See, 'UNA,' Page 13



COURTESY PHOTO

Edgar Amaya joined the UNA Lions after transferring from Colorado.

## RHS alum Hubbard excelling at Manchester University

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When the COVID-19 pandemic spread like wildfire across the country in the spring of 2020, most everything was impacted, including the recruiting process for high school senior athletes.

2020 Russellville High School graduate Jamaal Hubbard found himself on the wrong side of the pandemic when it came to his dream of continuing his football career at the collegiate level.

The COVID shutdown meant no recruiting visits, not even just to see the campuses, as most were sealed shut through the summer. And Hubbard and his classmates saw the spring semesters of their senior years grind to a halt as virtual classes became the norm.

But the multi-sport standout (he earned varsity letters at RHS in football, basketball and

track) didn't sulk or feel sorry for himself. He reached out to some college coaches and many of them started texting Hubbard after seeing game films where he excelled at his outside linebacker position for Coach John Ritter's Golden Tigers.

Hubbard was particularly impressed by one—Jonathan Ramos, Linebackers Coach at Manchester University.

"He really gave me a good visual of the school, the football program and the (North Manchester, Indiana) community," Hubbard said. "He replied quickly to my questions and stayed in contact with me more than other coaches. That was understandable, though, with so much going on.

"Coach Ramos was pretty insistent on me coming up there. He'd text me daily, ask how I was doing, and that meant a lot. I ended up committing before I ever got to go see the campus," he added.

See, 'HUBBARD,' page 12



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## 'HUBBARD,' From Page 11

In mid-June 2020, Hubbard's 'on campus' visit came in the form of a virtual tour of Manchester University. Hubbard and other recruits had the opportunity to talk with employees of the college outside of the football program. His decision was solidified. Manchester University it would be.

Three years later, Hubbard has paid big dividends for the Spartans. He played sparingly his freshman year, but still had four tackles and one pass breakup in two games.

In 2021 and 2022, Hubbard totaled some impressive numbers: 20 games, 96 total tackles, five tackles for a loss and three interceptions, including two returned for touchdowns. Hubbard was named the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference Defensive Players of the Week on October 12, 2021 after he returned an interception 70 yards for a touchdown in Manchester's 22-0 defeat of Defiance College.

As he enters his junior year (in eligibility), Hubbard is expected to be a key part of the Spartans' defense once again. His success comes as no surprise to his former high school coach.

Hubbard played safety his freshman and sophomore years at Russellville, then moved to outside linebacker his final two seasons.

"Jamaal is such a hard worker. He's a good kid and it's fun to watch him play," Ritter said. "He's also a really good person on and off the field."

Manchester is a Division III university located in northern Indiana. The Spartans compete in the Heartland Conference, consisting of universities from Indiana and Ohio.

Hubbard loved the university, its campus and the community from the first day he saw the big sign welcoming you to Manchester University. Hubbard's biggest challenges? Getting his teammates to understand his Southern accent and getting used to northern Indiana's extreme winters.

"Everybody I met from my first day was really nice, happy and talkative," Hubbard said. "But it was different for me because they weren't used to a Southern accent. I got asked for a long time where I was from. It took a little while to adjust—going to college as a freshman in a completely different state, far away from my family.

"But my dad kept in touch with me all the time to make sure things were going well. I talked with him a lot. I met some really good people I'm still friends with now. Our professors are really nice and they make sure you get the help you need, and that reminds me of Russellville. They go out of their way to make sure every student learns as much as possible in the best way for them," he added.

The son of James and Ginger Hubbard, Jamaal is majoring in Business Management/Marketing.

When winter hit his freshman year, Hubbard wasn't prepared.

"It snowed a little bit as soon as I got back from Christmas break (which lasted through January 2021). I had online classes during January and when we got back, I woke up the next morning and it snowed for four days straight," Hubbard said.

"We practiced in the snow and that was a big adjustment. I've never played or practiced in 10-15 degree weather. It eventually became really fun though and everyone enjoyed it," he added.

Hubbard has the mind frame necessary to succeed on defense. He recalls something his high school coach said that's stuck with him for years.

"On offense, one guy can make a mistake and you can still have a ball carrier end up making a big play. But for the defense, one guy makes a mistake and the other team gets six points. It really makes the game challenging when you look at it that way," Hubbard said.

And that challenge is what keeps Hubbard driven. There's something special about a defense working together on football field, even a frozen one.

"I love how close a defense has to be, how connected they are and the way they celebrate together on big hits and interceptions," Hubbard said. "I love that. It's the best part of the game. Defense is the side of the ball where you always have energy."

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# 'UNA,' From Page 11

winning program it has always has been," Amaya said.

At Russellville, Amaya earned All-State honors and played in the Alabama-Mississippi All Star Game.

Williams is expected to be a defensive starter and Brockway is in the rotation as a tight end for the Lions.

Williams, a line-backer, appeared in all 11 of UNA's games last year.

Brockway, a three sport athlete at RHS, was twice named All-Region.

"I went two years without seeing these guys and now it's a refresher to see Ashaad across on defense again," Amaya said.

"I think UNA is a special place that has a won a lot of ball games. It gives me and all the guys who coached these players a reason to go watch UNA," head Russellville football coach John Ritter said

## ANNOUNCEMENT From the Family of Hosea!

All of God's grace in one little face. Happy to announce the birth of a little baby boy. He arrived on May 12, 2023, at 1:07 p.m., Central Standard Time, in Madison, Alabama, to the parents of Charles Jr. Bey and O'Rissa. He weighed seven (7) pounds exactly, length nineteen and a half inches (19.5").

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# 'ALL-STARS,' From Page 11

Titus Nix and Braylin Hallman each drew a walk, loading the bases. Miles Duboise then blasted a two-run double to right to stretch the team's lead to 3-0.

Cochran singled to drive in two more runs.

Georgia rallied to score three runs in the final two innings, but Hamilton got a key strikeout with two runners in scoring position to end the threat.

Scott navigated through the pitch count rules using primarily three pitchers—Cochran, Hamilton and Baker.

Hamilton's finest moment actually came in the team's final game, a 10-3 loss to Florida. He came in in the second inning and got out of a jam to keep it close at 2-1. Florida added an unearned run in the third but was then shut out in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh innings by Hamilton.

Hamilton's double in the bottom of the sixth scored Duboise and the game was tied 3-3. Hamilton was thrown out trying to advance from third to home on a disputed call at the plate that would have won the game for Phil Campbell.

Against Florida, Cochran threw 38 pitches, 23 of them for strikes. Hamilton threw 85 pitches, with 56 crossing the strike zone and three of Baker's four pitches were strikes.

"We rode the Cochran kid. He was spot on throwing in the low 70s," Scott said. "But he was a little off on his control Sunday. So we pulled him before 40 pitches so we could use him again.

"Ty came in and pitched lights out. We were down 2-1 and (other than a run not charged to Hamilton) he shut them down all the way to the eighth inning. Hamilton pitched a gem. The Baker kid pitched a lot for us and did well all the way through," Scott added.

On Saturday, Phil Campbell moved into the loser's bracket after falling to Sweetwater, Tennessee All Stars 8-5.

Cochran pitched well in his 1.2 innings and was effective at the plate, going 1-3 with two RBI. Duboise had the only multi-hit game against Tennessee, as he went 2-3.

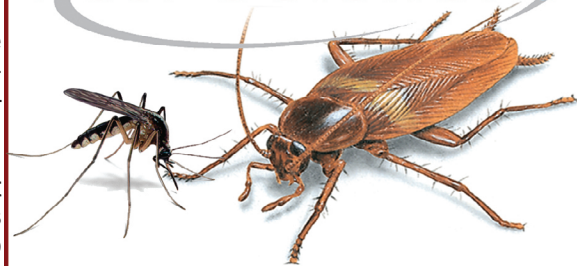
Scott's assistant coaches were Anthony Cochran and Greg Hamilton. Team members included: Miles Duboise, Braylin Hallman, Eli Baker, Jack Owens, Jacob Potter, Kruz Cochran, Max Robinson, Noah Miller, Titus Nix, Tripp Nix and Ty Hamilton.

As of press time Monday, it appeared that Tennessee and Florida, the teams who handed Phil Campbell its two losses, would play for the championship.

"We were as good as any team there," Scott said. "We just didn't hit the ball like we were at state. I think the kids had an awesome experience. We didn't just finish fifth out of the 10 teams at the World Series. We were fifth among all Dixie Youth teams.

"This is something they'll remember the rest of their lives. You go to win. You go to compete and I feel we competed hard. I made some mistakes. We made some mistakes, but there's no reason to hang your head down finishing fifth in the World Series," Scott added.

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# Phil Campbell Council to name varsity baseball field after Raper

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When former Phil Campbell High School baseball coach Jonathan Raper learned the school's baseball field was to be named in his honor, Raper's reaction was one of genuine surprise.

"I had no idea. It's a great honor that I appreciate, but there are a lot of people who helped our program be successful," Raper said. "From our players, to our great assistant coaches, to the parents and community—and I couldn't have done any of this without my wife Deedra. I never had to worry about the concession stand, gate, etc. All I had to do was show up."

In his 12 years in Phil Campbell, Raper did much more than just 'show up.' His program became a powerhouse in Class 3A, with a state title in 2021, four consecutive Final Four appearances, nine area titles, eight Franklin County championships and 12 of Raper's players signed college scholarships.

Recognizing the contribution Raper made to the community, the Phil Campbell City Council voted July 18th to name the varsity baseball field at the Roger Bedford, Jr., Complex, Jonathan Raper Field.

The complex name will not change. The varsity baseball field will now be named in Raper's honor.

Raper resigned last month as the Bobcats' coach, citing a desire to free his spring schedule to be able to see his sons, Ridge and Sage, play baseball at the University of Tennessee-Southern in Pulaski.

He was hired this month as Belgreen High School's first varsity football coach. One of Raper's former assistant coaches, Griffin Harris, was hired to lead the Bobcat baseball program.

"We had talked about doing this dedication before Coach Raper announced he was stepping down," said Phil Campbell Councilwoman

Lynn Landers. "We realize the tremendous impact he had on our community. His team brought home a state championship and they contend for it every year."

A dedication ceremony will be planned later this year after Gault Signs prepares a sign for the field. Landers said Raper and his family will be invited to the dedication.

Raper said the community support shown to his Phil Campbell team was exceptional, and something noticed by coaches, players and umpires around the state.

"No matter where we played or what was on the line, we always had great community support," Raper said. "Last year, we had an umpire crew from Tuscaloosa. One of the crew said he couldn't believe the atmosphere and crowd we had. He called 6A and 7A games all the time, and said he didn't see the crowds or excitement we had here."

"The community of Phil Campbell was great to me and our program. That was one thing that make leaving there so difficult—the support we received. No matter what we needed or asked for, the people of Phil Campbell always responded and got it done," he added.

Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton said the council's recognition of Raper was well deserved.

"His success speaks for itself. Coach Raper's hard work and success with the baseball program at Phil Campbell will be remembered for many years," Hamilton said.



COURTESY PHOTO  
Coach Jonathan Raper receiving a resolution from Sen. Larry Stutts.



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# Street department efforts improve runoff issues for Franklin Street resident

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

When Richard Ramos purchased his home on East Franklin Street in 2019, it was a proud moment for the new Russellville resident.

Ramos did some exterior renovation, planted a garden and landscaped to improve the look of his new home.

Then a heavy rain came, and Ramos' yard had a small river flowing through it. Rainfall runoff spilled over into Ramos' yard from a large ditch that runs on the west edge of his property.

For the past three years, Ramos has dealt with regular flooding in his yard, under his front porch and into his home. At times, more than two feet of standing water was visible under Ramos' front porch.

There is some debate about whether Ramos knew of the flooding issues before he purchased the home. He says the previous owner said nothing about it, but city officials say the drainage ditch adjacent to his property has been there for decades.

During that time, he's explained the problem to anyone with the City of Russellville who'd listen. And he finally got some relief this spring when Russellville Street Department Manager Shannon Wilson and his staff cleaned the ditch, removed brush, roots and debris and widened the ditch, which significantly improved the overflow problem.

That ditch is part of the drainage route for water runoff on Lawrence Street. Runoff water from the hill where Auto Zone is located runs west along Lawrence then crosses under Lawrence and flows north in a drainage ditch that borders Ramos' land.

There are three large drain pipes that run under Franklin Street to carry water into a gravity flow drainage ditch on the north side of the street.

The problem causing flooding was twofold: First, the three drainage pipe openings in his front yard were partially collapsed and broken. Second, according to Russellville City Councilman David Palmer, the large amount of water running into the pipes was not able to flow out of the one opening

on the other side of Franklin. The result? Spill over into Ramos' front yard. At times, the runoff was so bad it ran into Ramos' neighbor's yard. That neighbor eventually paved his entire front yard to prevent flooding. Since the Street Department's work, flooding issues have 'greatly improved' according to Ramos.

After Ramos contacted the Franklin Free Press last year, Wilson and Palmer both personally inspected the issue. Wilson said his staff did what it could to improve the problem, but Palmer (the former Franklin County

Engineer) said the long-term solution would be to expand the drainage pipe across the street where the water has a larger downhill pathway to drain.

"I understand Mr. Ramos' frustration and the work we did was just about everything we could do to help him," Wilson said. "We expanded the ditch and made it wider and deeper before it goes into the drainpipes. We also cleared a lot of brush and debris which helps the water flow."

Although he still has long-term concerns about flooding continuing, as well as the possibility a portion of his yard could collapse on top of the broken pipes, Ramos appreciates the work that has been done. "All I want is to be able to live in my house and not have to see it ruined by flooding. I thank them for the work they did to make it flow better. But I still worry about this. Something needs to be done long-term to fix the problem. "There's too much water coming off from Auto Zone and down Lawrence. Why does it run across the street into my yard? That ditch isn't enough to hold all that water," Ramos said.



PHOTO BY JOHN PILATI

Three drainage pipes in Richard Ramos' front yard.

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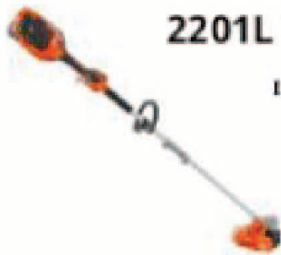


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