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SINGING RIVER

Russellville High School among Alabama's Top 20 high schools in U.S. **News & World Report ranking**

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

Russellville High School is among the state's top 20 high schools in the 2023 U.S. News and World Report rankings.

RHS was ranked 18th among Alabama's 386 high schools, the highest ranking the school has achieved. Last year, RHS was ranked 22nd in the state.

Alabama public high schools were graded by the following methodology: College Readiness 30%, State Assessment Proficiency 20%, State Assessment Performance 20%, Underserved Student Performance 10%, College Curriculum Breadth 10% and Graduation Rate 10%.

These factors look at how schools are preparing their students to be college ready, aggregated scores on state standardized tests, state assessments among students who are Black, Hispanic and from lowincome households, how many 12th graders took and earned a qualifying score on AP and IB exams and the percentage of entering ninth graders who graduated four academic years later. The data used to calculate

See 'RANKING,' Page 9

Willis: Even with medical retirement. 'heart and soul' remains with RFD

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

For more than 20 years Neil Willis has been a fixture in the Russellville Fire Department.

That tenure came to an end September 1st, as Willis' medical retirement became effective subject to approval by the Russellville City Council at its September 5th meet-

When he was hired on March 3, 2003, the 38-year-old Willis became the oldest fire fighter to go through the rookie school at the Alabama Fire College, and he likely taught his younger fellow cadets a thing or two about physical fitness.

Willis advanced steadily up the

ranks within the department, as he was promoted to lieutenant in 2006 and captain in 2014. He earned an impressive 24 certifications through the Alabama Fire College and Willis led the Franklin County Dive Team for 18 years.

He didn't intend to or want to retire. But after recent knee replacement surgery on both knees, Willis' orthopedic surgeon advised he would not be able to return to work due to the physical demands of the job.

"I had total knee replacement on both knees," Willis said. "One knee is doing really well and one not so well. I love serving this city and have given it my heart and soul.

"I love helping people and that's what I do in this job. It's going to

See 'WILLIS,' Page 5

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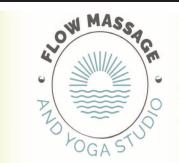
-Marc Patterson, Google Review

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March 5, 2024 Republican Primary

Joseph

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Larry Wayne "Bubba" Tompkins, 70, of Russellville, passed away Wednesday, August 30, 2023. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.



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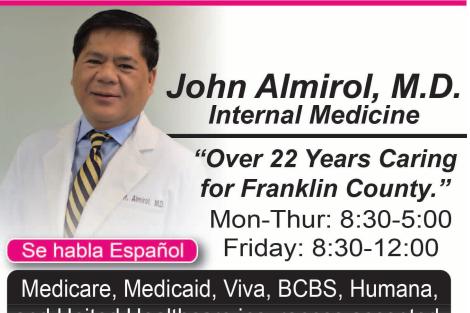
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Publisher

John Pilati

Executive Editor

Michael Rice

E-mail: franklinfreepress@yahoo.com

Sales Representatives

Michael Rice, John Pilati

Content Contributors

Gail Motes, Willodean Davis, Hayden Moss

Graphic Design

Jason Hill

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Letters to the editor

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wn people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submis toons or letters to the

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Foster Parent class starts September 10th for Franklin County

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

A new Foster Parent training course will begin soon and Franklin County Department of Human Resources employees are encouraging local residents to sign up.

Alabama has 5,921 children currently placed in foster care, with 90 of those being Franklin County residents.

Franklin County has only 28 licensed foster homes, so DHR workers must transport many of those 90 foster children out of county, sometimes several hours away.

Licensing requirements to be a Foster Parent include:

- --19 years or older.
- --Criminal background checks for all household members 19 or older.
- --Clearance of State Central Registry on Child Abuse and Neglect for all household members 14 years or older.
 - -- Family stability.
- --Regular source of income that meets your family's financial needs.

--If married, must be married at least one year.

Classes begin September 10, 2023, from 2-5 p.m., at Franklin County DHR Building on Highway 48. This is a 10-week training class.

For more information, contact LeiLani Johnson at 256-331-5940 or to reserve a spot in the class.



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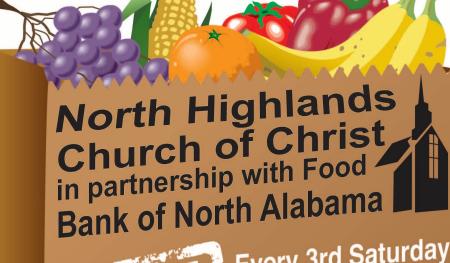


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"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat Matthew 25:35

WILLIS,' From Page 1

fire fighter.

Mansell said.

be really difficult for me not to be part of this department," he added. Russellville City Councilman Darren Woodruff said Willis is the type

of person who puts serving others first and both the RFD and the City of Russellville will be impacted by his retirement.

"Neil is a great guy with a great family. He's done a great job for the City of Russellville and it's a shame seeing him have to retire because of a medical condition," Woodruff said. "I wish Neil and his family the best and may God bless them."

Willis has been on medical disability since October 2022 after having both knees replaced three weeks apart.

When he spoke with RFD Chief Joe Mansell about his medical retirement, it was an emotional conversation for both men.

"I talked with Chief about becoming a volunteer fire

fighter," Willis said. "I still want to be part of the department and I'll go on any fire call I can and I'll try to be at most of them. Having someone with 20 years experience helps and I'll help any way I can."



Fire Department is left with 17 employees. The department is currently accepting applications and Mansell hopes to return to 20 employees "Everyone in the fire station, including me and (Fire Marshal) Justin Green, we all fight fire, so it's important to be fully staffed," Mansell

the hurt on the department," Mansell said.

In his retirement letter, Willis summed up what it means to be part of the brotherhood of the RFD.

In Willis, Mansell may have the state's most overqualified volunteer

"He and Jonathan Pace (another 20-year RFD veteran who retired

recently) will be more than just volunteers. They'll provide fire ground

support at the scene and that's going to help our department a lot,"

With two experienced fire fighters retiring this year, Mansell said los-

"Jonathan was a lieutenant and Neil a captain. I hated to see them go.

Along with the recent retirement of Noah Daughtery, the Russellville

ing more than 40 years' experience certainly impacts the department.

When you start taking guys in excess of 20 years experience, that puts

"Today, as I retire, I have one last request—that I may be put on as a volunteer. I have years of experience and knowledge I want to pass on and still help my brothers as we move this department forward. I still want to be a part because Russellville Fire has been my life and is such an integral part of who I am," Willis said.

"When you spend 24 hours with someone, that's more time than you spend with your own family. It's a brotherhood and a family and it's hard to give it up," he added.



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The Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools.

Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools for the coming school year. Please call 256-332-6800 for an application.

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The 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.

Pastor 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.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman's job is to protect the rights of Residents of long term care facilities, including Nursing Homes, Assisted Living Facilities, and Specialty Care Assisted Living Facilities. The Ombudsman works to ensure that the Residents receive fair treatment and quality care. Anyone can contact the Ombudsman to report long term care problems or to request information about long term care facilities in Franklin, Colbert, Lauderdale, Marion and Winston Counties. For more information please contact Tina Pitt, local Ombudsman, at 256-389-0533.

Gateway Church will have Evangelist Perry Stone in service September 10, 2023 at 10:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Due to the fire at our church the services will be held at the Russellville High School Auditorium. For more information please call 256-627-7935.

ImostBama, a Tribute to the Band Alabama, will be at Russellville's Roxy Theatre on Saturday, Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. For ticket information, call 615-479-0954 or visit www.aprilpotterentertainment.com for more information.

Tennessee River Bass Club is seeking members for our 23/24 season. Club fishes monthly on Tennessee river and Bear Creek lakes. We welcome boaters or non-boaters 16 or older of all experience levels to join. Club is based in Sheffield. For more information, contact Tommy 256-627-5662.

North Russellville Baptist Church will host its October Youth Fest 23 on Sunday, Oct. 1st, at 5 p.m. Praise and worship by Dustin Richardson and Three Strong. Finger foods to follow event. Church is located at 1401 Waterloo Road.

Have an event we can help publicize? Call us at 256-332-0255.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net. Send your letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



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Aderholt visits with Tiffin management during stop in Red Bay

Jason Collum Special to the FFP

Congressman Robert Aderholt made a quick stop in Red Bay on Tuesday morning, August 29th, to visit with leadership at Tiffin Motorhomes

and some of Red Bay's and Franklin County's leaders.

Aderholt said he was impressed with the work and production of Tiffin Motorhomes and was pleased to see the company has been pivoting to create new vehicle lines to meet customer demand and adjust to changes in the recreational vehicle industry.

While in Red Bay, Aderholt stopped by Hotel Red Bay for lunch with Red Bay Mayor Charlene Fancher, Community Spirit Bank President and City Councilman Brad Bolton and Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore.

Fancher said she was pleased to see Tiffin once again expanding its number of employees and she expects the long-time business to remain a fixture in Red Bay for years to come.

Aderholt had previously planned to also tour the Red Bay Museum, but the need to attend a funeral in Huntsville that afternoon meant the museum visit would have to wait for another future visit.



COURTESY PHOTO

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Rep. Aderholt, left, speaks with Kreg Kennedy, his senior field representative in the Tuscumbia office, and Jody and Sheri Farris, operators of Hotel Red Bay.

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AUGUST 30, 2023

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The Russellville Water & Sewer Board will be requesting quotes be provided for the Post-Construction Site Cleanup and Erosion Control Management Requirements along County HWY 75. This is for dress-up work along the sloped shoulder areas where a new water line has been installed. The Contractor shall provide the labor, equipment, and materials required to complete the work.

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Quotes must be received by September 14, 2023, at the Russellville Water & Sewer Board office by 10:00 A.M. If mailing a hard copy via USPS, FedEx; UPS, etc. please ensure it is delivered by 9:30 a.m. at the Russellville Water & Sewer Board Office by the Bid Date. If the quote is emailed, send quote to Rod Hawkins at rhawkins@uecllc.com

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact Rod Hawkins, Utility Engineering Consultants, LLC at (205) 951-3838 or rhawkins@uecllc.com for project details and specifications.

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Knowledge of safety and property firefighting equipment.

Knowledge of containment and cleanup of hazardous material, evacuation procedures, evacuation procedures, safe extraction procedures, and basic rescue techniques.

Knowledge of up-to-date EMS protocols, hydraulics as applied to pump operations and water pressure, safety rules, skills to comprehend operator manuals, directives, procedures, and instructions.

Ability to communicate with supervisor and co-workers, writing skills for forms and records, math skills to basic calculations, skills to operate power equipment and hand tools

Ability to do the essential functions of the job as directed in this description.

Willingness to: work overtime, irregular hours, weekends and holidays; travel and attend seminars and workshops.

QUALIFICATIONS and SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

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Minimum of 18 years of age

Ability to obtain and maintain a valid Alabama Firefighter 1 Firefighter II certification within

The first year of employment

Ability to obtain and maintain on Emergency Medical Technician (Basic) certification within

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Applications and copies of the Job Descriptions may be obtained at the Russellville City Hall, Office of the Mayor, 304 North Jackson Avenue. Applications submitted to the Russellville Civil Service Board less than one year ago remain active. Those individuals need not reapply in order to receive consideration for this appointment. Applications must be returned no later than September 11, 2023 BY U.S. MAIL TO:

THE RUSSELLVILLE CIVIL SERVICE BOARD
P. O. BOX 308
RUSSELLVILLE, AL 35653

The appointees will be required to successfully complete a physical examination including drug and alcohol screening prior to employment.

'RANKING,' From Page 1

these rankings came from the 2020-2021 school year.

Among the 17,680 high schools across the United States, Russellville

High School is ranked No. 1,747, placing it in the top 10 percent.

The AP participation rate among RHS students is 74 percent, with 20 percent passing at least one AP exam.

The total enrollment is 710 students. The total minority enrollment is 60% (50.8% Hispanic, 5.9% Black, 1.5% Two or More Races, 0.8% Asian and 0.7% American Indian). Russellville High School is the only top 25 school with a majority minority enrollment. The school also has a 48%



Russellville City Schools Superintendent Heath Grimes said he was very pleased to see the school's Top 20 ranking. With the system's unique racial demographics, including the state's largest number of non-English proficient students who start school in Russellville City Schools, Grimes said teachers and administrators continue to meet the challenges presented by embracing them.

"I am extremely proud of our school system, the leadership of Dr. (Jason) Goodwin and Dr. (Jeremy) Madden, the assistant principals we have in place and the entire leadership team at RHS and RCS, as well as all the teachers and students for their efforts to get us to this ranking," Grimes said.

"I'm not surprised though. This data is from the 2020-21 school year. It's just a continued path of the progress that we've made and continue to make. We already know our data is going to be just as strong or stronger next year," Grimes said.

Kim Burney, AP U.S. History teacher at RHS, said she was pleased to see her school grow and improve, particularly with AP proficiency as part of the criteria.

"This program, along with administrative support over the years, has been crucial to expanding the AP program and ensuring student success," Burney said. "I am very proud of our students, and I think our community will reap the rewards of their efforts for years to come because mastering these skills leads to being better citizens overall in the future."



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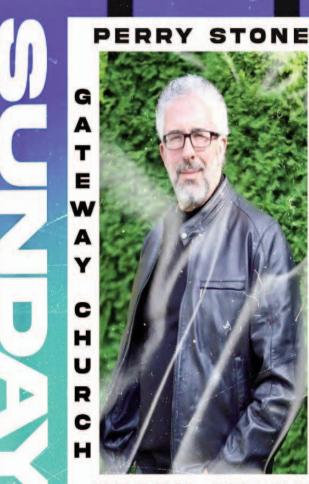


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SPORTS

9.6.23

Red Bay runs past Hamilton 54-27 in opener for both teams

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

The game was played one week after originally scheduled, but it was worth the wait for the Red Bay Tigers, who stomped Hamilton Thursday evening 54-27.

Coach Heath Childers was notified last Friday by Hamilton High School officials that due to an emergency water shortage in the city, school had been canceled and the football game set for that evening would have to be postponed.

On Thursday, Red Bay's offensive players needed plenty of that now safe Hamilton drinking water as the Tigers scored six touchdowns, including four by sophomore running back Jaxon Vinson, who finished with 248 yards rushing. Vinson added four two-point conversions to account for 32 of his team's 54 points.

Vinson ran behind the offensive line of Kyler Watson, Rhett Lockhart, Jack West, Will West, Kaiden Blansett and Reed Hamilton, who collectively blew open holes in the running lanes all game. Vinson had two touchdown runs of seven yards, one four-yard score and a 48-yard TD

First contact was often in the defensive backfield, a sign the Tigers' offensive line was dominating.

"They won the battle all night, they really did," Childers said of his O-line. "They missed one

See, 'RED BAY,' Page 13

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Golden Tigers overcome fast Deshler start to earn 35-13 win

Hayden Moss Franklin Free Press

The annual renewal of one of the most storied rivalries in northwest Alabama high school football did not disappoint again.

After spotting the Deshler Tigers 13 first quarter points, the Russellville Golden Tigers (2-0) scored 35 unanswered points to win 35-13. Deshler fell to 0-2 and will host West Limestone this Friday.

Russellville head coach John Ritter was pleased with how his team overcame the early adversity.

"We were relaxed defensively," said Ritter. "We were relaxed offensively because we didn't play for 35 minutes. I'm very proud of the response because that can be frustrating when they kept the ball, the onside kick and got it but what a response from our guys to come out and score 35 unanswered points and shut

them out the rest of the way."

Deshler converted two fourth down attempts, including one for a one-yard score by Prince Thornton, to take an early 7-0 lead. On the ensuing kickoff, the Tigers recovered an onside kick and maintained possession into the second quarter.

One minute into the second quarter, the Tigers scored again on a 21-yard touchdown pass, making it 13-0 with 11:01 left in the half.

The Golden Tigers responded with a touchdown of their own with 5:55 remaining in the second quarter, a 15-yard pass from Harrison Burch to Nicklaus Pounders.

After a couple of good stops on defense by the Golden Tigers, they soon scored again with a touchdown run from nine yards out by Cam Phinizee. With the newfound momentum, the Golden Tigers went on to score one more time before the half on a reverse pass from Burch to Cash Crumpton for 21 yards.

See, 'TIGERS,' page 14

Bulldogs break through!



COURTESY PHOT

The scoreboard tells the story at Harris Stadium in Cherokee as the Belgreen Bulldogs football team won its first game since Coach Jonathan Raper's team started the program in August, defeating the Cherokee Indians, 38-26. Belgreen traveled to luka Tuesday evening to face Tishomingo County and the Bulldogs will play at Vina on September 18th.



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Golden Tiger volleyball team upsets Mississippi powerhouse Alcorn Central

Michael Rice Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Golden Tigers volleyball team got a good look at its progress the past two weeks after competing in multiple tournaments and tri-matches.

Coach Will White's Golden Tigers started their season against Lexington at Wilson High School on August 24th.

Lexington defeated Russellville 2-0, winning game one 25-17 and 25-11 in the next game.

The Golden Tigers were ready for redemption in the next match and defeated Wilson 25-23 and 25-18.

Against Wilson, Avery Watts had 12 kills while Natalie Nichols had nine. Sophomore Laila Hill added five kills.

"We came out sluggish against Lexington and made too many errors to overcome. Against Wilson I reminded them to trust their training and trust each other. Overall, I'm pleased with our performance," White said.

The Golden Tigers traveled to Alcorn Central in Mississippi to compete in a tournament on August 26th.

In the first match of the tournament, the Golden Tigers faced Kossuth and lost both games.

The Golden Tigers then faced North Pontotoc and won the match 2-1. Russellville next faced Belmont and lost in straight games. Belmont is a two-time defending Mississippi state champion.

The Golden Tigers came back late in the day and beat Walnut two of three games to win the match.

Russellville returned home to face Brewer (region game) and

Hartselle in a tri-match tournament on August 29th.

The Golden Tigers lost 2-1 to Brewer and was swept in two games by Hartselle.

"Although the score doesn't reflect it, I had two girls, Avery Watts and Blevyn Sappington who played very well,"

White said.
The Golden Tigers
faced Alcorn Central at
home last Thursday night
and defeated Alcorn
three games to none.
The score of the first

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game was 25-23, and the second and third was 25-20 and 25-23. Alcorn Central, a Mississippi power, dropped to 15-3 with the loss. Nichols led the way with 13 kills on 27 swings, hitting .407 on the night. Watts added seven kills while Hill and eighth-grader Sappington added six kills each.

"This was a great win for our program. The seniors stepped up and our younger players matured during the game. I'm very proud of the energy and the effort. This was truly a team effort and I'm so proud that we played so well against a very good team," White said.

The Golden Tigers improved to 4-7 on the season and 0-1 in region play.

Russellville traveled to Lawrence County in Moulton on Tuesday, September 5th. The Golden Tigers travel to Haleyville for a tri-match with the Lions and Lamar County on Thursday, Sept. 7th.

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'RED BAY,' From Page 11

blocking assignment and we were hit with a no gain. Other than that, everything was positive."

Senior quarterback Gage Edgmon was spot-on when his number was called. He had two touchdown passes to Holden Inmon, a first quarter 66-yarder and a 35-yard hookup in the second.

Senior Cody Carnes broke loose for a 72-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter, part of a 24-point second half for the Tigers, who gave up only one second half score on the Aggies' initial drive.

Childers was pleased with his team's offensive diversity, which will make it harder for defensive coordinators who scout Red Bay to come up with a game plan.

"We didn't have to show our whole offense tonight," Childers said. "We work on a lot of different stuff and you're able to do that when you're in year three of the same system.

"The kids are familiar with our offensive system and know what we're doing and what we look for. Once they have that grasp of what you're implementing, you can start adding to it. And we can throw the ball, but why would you if you don't have to?," Childers added.

In a stroke of good fortune, both teams had a bye on Friday, Sept. 1st, so the game was set for a Thursday evening kickoff at 7 p.m.

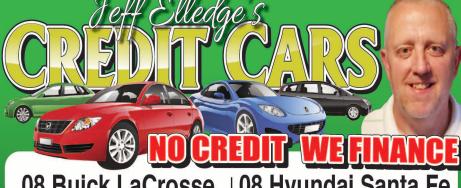
Childers watched his offense commit two turnovers in the first quarter, but the Tigers' defense kept the Aggies out of the end zone on both drives.

The Tigers (1-0) travel to Lexington Friday, September 8th.

The Golden Bears won their opener against Colbert Heights by a 42-25 score. With Lexington, Childers said his defense will see a familiar look on the other side of the ball.

"They get up under center and run the football too. We're a lot alike. They want to be physical, win the game up front and they have a couple receivers on the edge who can go get the football," Childers said. "We're very similar football teams."

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dcats run past Phillips 22-15

Michael Rice Franklin Free Press

After a lopsided loss in their season opener, the Tharptown Wildcats won their first game Friday night over the Phillips Bears, 22-15.

The Wildcats overcame many obstacles to finish the ballgame on top including a first quarter inadvertent whistle that negated a Tharptown touchdown.

"These guys had a lot of factors working against them and I am so proud of them for pulling through. We focus on one thing at a time and that showed during this game," Tharptown's head coach John Johnson

The scoring began with a four-yard touchdown run by Phillips to take

Jackson Clement responded for the Wildcats with a seven-yard touchdown. The PAT was missed, so Phillips led 7-6 at the end of the first quarter.

In the second quarter, the Bears tripped the Wildcats up in the end zone for a safety and also scored on a nine-yard pass to take a 15-6

The Wildcats' Dawson Higgins scored on a 32-yard run and converted the Tharptown made the two-point conversion to make it a 15-14 game in the third guarter.

In the fourth quarter, Wildcat Jeremy Vasquez ran a 14-yard touchdown and Tharptown converted the two-point conversion to end the scoring at 22-15.

Vasquez had 12 carries for 132 yards and one touchdown to lead the Wildcats' offense.

"Vasquez had an exceptional game and he was someone we could count on in a tight space," Johnson said.

Higgins had ten carries on the night and ran for 97 yards and one touchdown and Clements had ten carries for 60 yards.

Defensively, Higgins had five tackles and six assists for the night.

The Wildcats will face another test next week as they travel to Tanner on Friday, September 8th.

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'TIGERS,' From Page 11

Burch finished 8-11 for 93 yards and two touchdowns as the Golden Tigers outscored Deshler 14-0 in the second half. Bralynn Vincent led the receiving corps with three receptions for 29 yards.

Ritter was asked about halftime adjustments or motivational words he shared with his team.

"You know, just doing what we do. There was no magical speech, no magical plays or calls it was just settling down and just playing and credit to them because they did a really good job of having us schemed up and doing some different things that we haven't seen ever from Deshler or a Wing-T team," Ritter said.

"But at the same time I think we responded and made some adjust-

ments and really executed on both sides of the ball," Ritter explained.

The second half opened up with both Russellville and Deshler's first possessions each ending in three and outs.

The Golden Tigers' second possession ended quickly with a 80-yard touchdown run by Phinizee, extending the lead to 28-13. Phinizee made the most of his 13 carries, rushing for 175 yards and three touch-

Zaye Eggleston carried seven times for 67 yards, including a 39-yard run. Freshman Tarus Davis had five carries for 32 yards.

With a full head of steam, Russellville held Deshler to another three and out. Phinizee finished the next Golden Tigers' drive with a 19-yard touchdown run. Manny Martinez hit his fifth PAT to finish the scoring at 35-13.

Russellville opens Class 5A, Region 8 play at Lawrence County this Friday, with kickoff set for 7 p.m.



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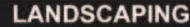
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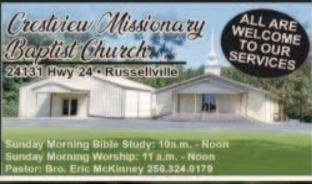




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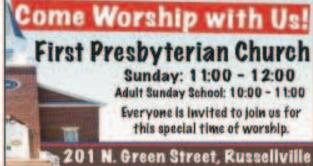




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