

Russellville grad produces Grammy-nominated music for Chris Brown

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

When the 65th Grammy Awards aired Sunday night, one Russellville resident watched intently to learn if he would be part of a Grammy-winning album.

Danny Delgado, a 2018 Russellville High School graduate, co-produced Chris Brown's 2022 single Addicted, with Nile Waves.

That song is featured on Brown's 10th album, Breezy, nominated for Best Rhythm and Blues (R&B) Album at the 2023 Grammys. Although

Robert Glasper's album Black Radio III was named the winner, to produce music on a Grammy-nominated album was still an unforgettable experience for Delgado.

Brown released Breezy, which includes Addicted, featuring rapper/songwriter Lil Baby, on June 24, 2022. While it's the superstar's voice that commands the attention of millions of fans, it's Delgado (and Waves) who put the beat and tempo of the music into the song. Brown's official video of Addicted has more than 6.6 million views.

And Addicted was one of five songs
See 'PRODUCER,' Page 8

McDermitt to head Russellville Downtown Collective

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Downtown Collective (RDC) found a familiar face to serve as its first Executive Director.

Ann Epperson McDermitt's hiring was announced by RDC officials Wednesday. She began her new position on February 1, 2023.

With more than three decades of marketing and event planning, McDermitt's vast experience in communications, grant writing, fundraising and alternative revenue streams for nonprofit organizations was particularly attractive to RDC officials.

McDermitt earned her Interior Design degree from Auburn

University's College of Architecture, Design and Construction. She served on the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce Board of Director and is a member of the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council.

As Executive Director, McDermitt will be in charge of the Russellville Downtown Collective's pathway toward designation as a Main Street Alabama city.

Main Street Alabama is an economic development concept that enhances the tax base of a community, fosters entrepreneurship, builds community capacity, and creates partnerships among key groups.

Last year, Russellville was designated as Main Street Alabama's first

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**Avis Louise VanTilburg, 91, of
Russellville, passed away on Saturday,
February 04, 2023. Spry Memorial
Chapel assisted the family.**

**Kristi Franks Blackburn, 48, of Florence
(formerly of Russellville), passed away
on Saturday, February 04, 2023.
Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the
family.**

**Robert Lois "Bob" Snider, 76, passed
away February 3, 2023. A celebration of
life will be held at Cherry Hill Baptist
Church, 5110 Hwy 244 Russellville, on
Saturday, February 11 at 11 a.m.**

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Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

Odom honored at UA baseball camp

Submitted

West Elementary School second grader Brady Odom participated in the Alabama Crimson Tide Baseball Youth Winter Camp on January 2-3, 2023. The camp was held in Tuscaloosa in the Hank Crisp Indoor Facility.

At the conclusion of Day One, Brady was chosen as "Camper of the Day," for his age group by Alabama pitcher Alton Davis II.

Davis said he chose Brady due to his "great attitude, strong arm and hard hitting."

Brady received a crimson wristband for his efforts.

This was the second year he took part in the camp. According to his mother, Jennifer Odom, Brady loves math and sports.

He played on the Shoals Creek 8U travel baseball team last fall, and his team won two tournaments.

Brady thanked his Shoals Creek coaches, teammates, team parents, Kevin Greenhill who worked with Brady on his pitching, and most of all, his Coach Alex Martin.

It won't be long until the spring season starts! Congratulations Brady, and Roll Tide!



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Bohannon remembers Garrison as one of the *Good Guys*

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Austin Bohannon remembers February 16, 2020, like it was yesterday. His phone rang and it was Bohannon's friend, Jacob Hamilton, calling with some devastating news. Zack Garrison, Bohannon's friend since 6th grade, was dead at the age of 22.

The cause of death? Likely an accidental overdose from a pill laced with fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid that's triggered a disturbingly large number of accidental overdoses across the country.

But the reason why wasn't important to Bohannon. His friend was gone and Bohannon was crestfallen.

So Bohannon turned to what he knows best and wrote a song about his friend. The words came quickly as he remembered a strong friendship that had grown a bit distant in recent years. Not because of any fight or disagreement. Instead, the two young men's lives simply went in different directions.

That song, called Good Guys, became deeply emotional for Bohannon, a 2016 Russellville High School graduate.

"When Jacob called me, we talked for a minute or so and I just sat down and wrote the song in about 20 minutes," Bohannon said. "It was the fastest I'd ever written a song. And every night for days I listened to it. I eventually sent it to (Zack's) mom, Michelle (Garrett).

"I told her I wrote it and felt it on my heart to send it to her. She later said it brought some peace to her family. I asked her if it would be okay to share it on Facebook and she agreed," Bohannon added.

Three years later, Good Guys will be Bohannon's second song release, following his November 2022 release of Radio. Good Guys will drop on Thursday, February 9, with the blessing of Zack's family.

The lyrics tell the story of his friend and how no one really knew what was going on in Zack's life, including Bohannon. With those thoughts came the inevitable guilt as Bohannon pondered the 'what ifs' had he stayed in better communication with Garrison, the father of two young children.

"That picture there she's in his hands,
His little baby girl.
And I hoped one day he'd have the chance

To show her the world.
I guess no one knew what was going on.
They couldn't feel his pain.
Waking up to that phone call he's gone--
I feel the same."

Although not in the same grade, Bohannon and Garrison became instant friends when Austin transferred to Russellville Middle School in the sixth grade. The two boys grew up together, playing Little League, football and eventually pushing the envelope in a way high school boys can do with the rules.

When Bohannon decided to focus on earning a baseball scholarship, that led him to Tuscaloosa's Shelton State Community College and later to the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His friendship with Zack never withered, but the two young men's lives were on varying paths.

"I was off chasing my baseball dream," Bohannon said. I go back to that moment in high school when we separated and thought 'what if' we'd stayed connected as much as we were back then. I think about that crossroads and wonder..."

Bohannon still gets emotional when he listens to Good Guys. "It takes me back to throwing a ball around in the front yard when Zack and I would sneak out of the house," Bohannon said. "There are so many times I want to remember. Everybody makes bad decisions. Nobody on planet earth escapes that. And who are we to judge? This song is about all the good times I had with him and my appreciation of the moments he had with me and the quality person Zack was."

"My best times are the ones you're in,
And right now I can't help but think
Why do the good guys gotta leave?
The good guys gotta leave?"

Bohannon's music career continues to grow. Between songwriting and a busy performance schedule, it's become a full-time effort.

You can learn more about Bohannon's music by visiting www.bohannon-music.com.

Good Guys will be available for download through Apple Music, iTunes, Spotify and Deezer.



COURTESY PHOTO
Zack Garrison, Wesley Bohannon and Austin Bohannon

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FCCDC grants include Franklin County Career Tech and Bear Creek Collaborative

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Community Development Commission met January 20, 2023, and approved a number of grants to local schools and non-profit agencies.

The commission, which includes Brad Bolton, Jeremy Campbell and Russellville Mayor David Grissom, meets quarterly to review grant applications. This was the first meeting for the new commission, which is comprised of two appointees from Franklin County's legislative delegation and a rotating seat between the mayors of Russellville and Red Bay. Sen. Larry Stutts reappointed Bolton and Rep. Jamie Kiel reappointed Campbell to another four-year term.

With the most recent grants, more than \$2.447 million has been returned to Franklin County since the inception of the funding. The funds come from in lieu of tax payments from the Tennessee Valley Authority.

- Grant awards for the January 20th meeting included:
- \$2,500 to Franklin County Career Tech Industrial Maintenance Classroom Project for purchase of machine equipment.
 - \$5,763.07 to Bear Creek Collaborative for purchase of equipment for grounds maintenance and upgrades and renovations.
 - \$6,000 transfer to Future Economic Development Fund.
 - \$800 to Belgreen High School for special education classroom Chromebook purchase.
 - \$250 to Vina High School for Scholar's Bowl expenses.
 - \$500 to Tharptown High School for Music Education purchase of Instruments and Resources.
 - \$1,500 to Franklin County Sheriff's Office for purchase of K-9 training equipment.
 - \$500 to Belgreen High School for Scholar's Bowl National Championship.
 - \$800 to Phil Campbell Elementary School for purchase of water filling station.
 - \$750 to Red Bay High School for purchase of automated external

defibrillator.

- \$800 to Weatherford Library for Summer Reading Program.
- \$800 to Tharptown High School for Rocketry Club purchase of materials and equipment.
- \$178 to Belgreen High School for purchase of automated external defibrillator storage cabinet.
- \$675 to Franklin County Schools for purchase of nine AED storage cabinets for athletic facilities across county.
- \$1,500 to Franklin County Schools for purchase of microphones, stands and accessories at Belgreen and Phil Campbell.
- \$506.25 to the Franklin County Times for publishing annual report.
- \$550 to Franklin Free Press for publishing annual report.
- \$318.60 to Red Bay News for publishing annual report.

The next meeting of the FCCDC will be March 31, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex. Grant requests for the March 31, 2023, meeting must be received by a commission member before 12 p.m., March 24, 2023.

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 **T**he Senior Center at Phil Campbell is under new management. The Town of Phil Campbell would like to invite and encourage everyone in our area that is 60 years and older to come be a part of the group. This is for men and women. They meet at the Phil Campbell Community Center Monday thru Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00. A delicious lunch is served around 11:00 a.m. Come on out and join in on the games or just sit and have a cup of coffee and socialize!! So if you, your parents, grandparents or your neighbor is 60 or older, pass the word and come out and enjoy a morning of fun.

 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host a "I Promise" Ladies Conference, free for ladies of all ages, March 10, 2023, from 6-9 p.m., and March 11, 2023, from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Come for a meal, music and a message! Church is located at 25100 Highway 24, Russellville.

 **T**he Cowboy Church of Franklin County is hosting "Love Month" all through February. Their speaker for every Sunday in February will be Jennifer Welch. She will be speaking about love. You won't want to miss this! The church is located at 25100 Highway 24 West in Russellville. Everyone invited!

 **T**he next meeting of the Franklin County Community Development Commission will be Friday, March 31, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex. All grant requests must be submitted to a member of the commission by Friday, March 24, 2023, at 12 p.m. Commission members include Brad Bolton, Jeremy Campbell and David Grissom.

 **R**ussellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling Boston Butts during Super Bowl Weekend. Butts are \$35 each and may be pre-ordered by dialing (256)810-1970. Pickup is Saturday February 11th, between 8-10am at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.

 **M**y Father's House Ministries will host a Revival from February 19-24 and February 26-March 2, 2023. Sunday services at 5 p.m., Monday-Friday at 6:30 p.m. Invite or bring your family and friends! Revival Ministers include Evangelist Mickey Wilson, Sis. Pam Patterson, Bro. Paul Colburn and many more! Praise and Worship from Sis. Kay Quade, MFH Music Minister along with Special Singing. Pastor Pearl Shelton and Pastor James Williams invite you and your family to attend. Call 256-460-1376 for more information or if you need a ride.

 **R**ockin' At The Roxy hosted by Kerry Gilbert and The KGB with special guest Au,stin Bohannon Saturday, February 11th, 7:00 pm. (Doors open at 6:00 pm) Tickets are available at Eventbrite.com Adults: \$15, Kids 6 and older: \$5, Under 6: Free.

PUBLIC NOTICE

RUSSELLVILLE HOUSING AUTHORITY SECTION 8 (HCV PROGRAM) IS NOW ACCEPTING NAMES FOR A WAITING LIST. COME IN THE OFFICE MONDAY FEBRUARY 13TH THRU MONDAY MARCH 20TH 7:00 AM UNTIL 4:00 PM TO DO A PRE-APPLICATION. MESSAGES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

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'MCDERMITT' from Page 1

Aspiring City, an approximate one-year tract for a community working toward Main Street Alabama status.



COURTESY PHOTO

New RV Downtown Collective Director Ann McDermitt. and growing force for economic development in our state," McDermitt

McDermitt, a Russellville resident, returned to her hometown in 2015 after a 30-year career. She plans to use that experience, including an appreciation for multiple cultures and cities, in her new position. "I want to reposition Russellville's historic downtown business district as a robust said. "I would like to be the person to lead this work towards the Main Street Alabama designation goal." Julie McKinney, Downtown Russellville Collective Board President, shared her excitement about having McDermitt at the helm. "We're very much looking forward to welcoming Ann onto the team and working with her to gain designation and move forward with our goals," McKinney said.

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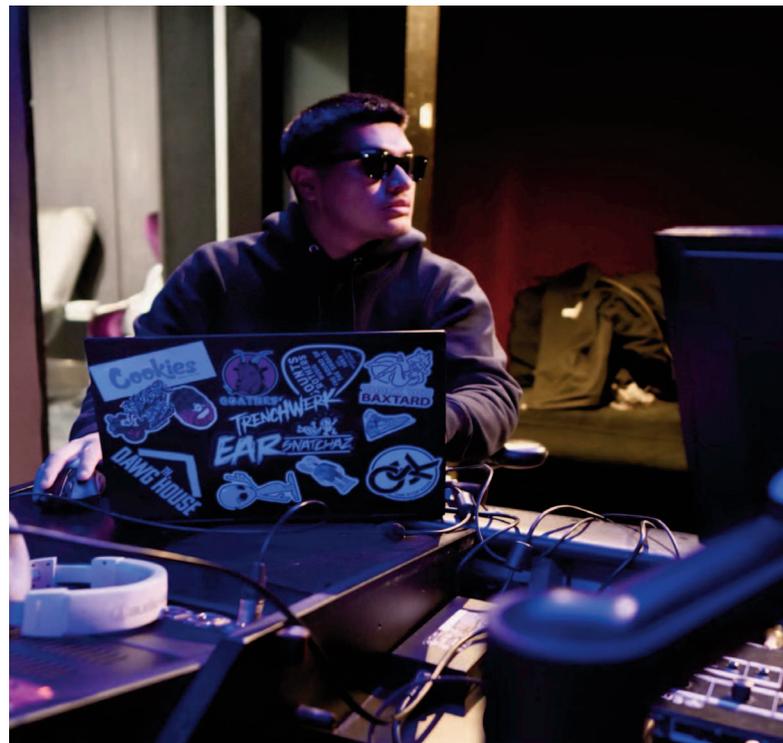
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'PRODUCER,' from Page 1

on Brown's album to chart in Billboard's Hot 100 R&B chart the same week he released the album.



Russellville music producer Danny Delgado.

Grammy nominations are nothing new for Brown, who's seen five of his 10 albums nominated for Grammys in the R&B genre. His 2012 album, F.A.M.E., won the same award he's up for tonight. Nothing new for Brown, but being part of a Grammy-

nominated album is uncharted territory for Delgado. Delgado, whose music production is done under the name 'DannyProdThis,' decided two years ago to quit college and dedicate himself full-time into music production. A decision like that can sometimes go

sideways with parents of an aspiring musician, but Delgado's parents, Corina Hernandez and Salomon Hernandez, were supportive of his decision.

"My mom was really there to help. She was just like 'if you really want to try this,' she would support my decision," Delgado said. "I was going to college just as something to get by. It wasn't what I wanted to do. I was working part-time jobs and one day I just decided I'll try music full-time, so that's what I did."

In simple terms, what Delgado does involves taking lyrics and creating the beat and tempo for the song. But that process is far from simple. And success doesn't come often or rapidly, at least most of the time.

Delgado's rise through the ranks to producing a Grammy-nominated song in less than two years is nothing less than spectacular. But Delgado didn't get there by luck. He works out of his bedroom production studio, but he's on the road constantly, traveling to showcase his music and to establish important contacts in the industry.

Although the Russellville resident is in Los Angeles this week, he's there to network and promote his music and did not attend the Grammys. But he definitely was watching. And he planned to attend some pre-Grammy parties as well.

"It's been a lot of hard work, but hard work is not anything for me," Delgado said. "Before anything blew up, it took me a good year and a half to get really good at what I was doing—making beats.

"I traveled to Atlanta and networked with all these producers and artists. I did that for more than a year, working and meeting the right people," he added.

Those efforts paid off when Delgado's work caught the eye of Mattazik Muzik, Lil Baby's main engineer, and a two-time Grammy nominee.

"I made one of my closest friendships in the music industry with him," Delgado said. "At first, I just built a relationship with Mattazik, just cooking up some ideas. Then one day I sent him some beats and sent him a pack and he said he wanted to use them for Lil Baby."

Less than a year later, 'DannyProdThis' had a production credit on Okay, a 2021 collaboration from Lil Baby and Lil Durk that would quickly earn gold certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), with more than 100,000 downloads.

Their album, The Voice of the Heroes, soon earned platinum certification when it surpassed 1,000,000 recordings. And producing one of the album's hit songs was Delgado.

"It was a long process from when I first sent the beats. I didn't expect anything to happen in any certain time frame. It just happened and that's how things usually work," Delgado said.

Lil Baby, with four platinum albums, is a major player among American rappers. When a young producer earns the respect of an artist of Lil Baby's level, doors can open, and sometimes a superstar like Brown walks in.

Delgado was working with Mattazik Muzik on another song for Lil Baby. A couple months later, Lil Baby announced Chris Brown would be recording Addicted with him.

"I didn't know I'd be part of a Chris Brown project until basically a month before the song dropped. My understanding was it would be a Lil Baby project," Delgado said. "I listened to Chris Brown growing up and was always around his music. It was pretty cool to hear I'd be part of his song. Then to receive a Grammy nomination, I'm not gonna lie—that caught me by surprise," Delgado said.

Delgado's success finds him working even harder to carve out a niche in the music industry. There's no time to rest.

"I know through the 2-3 years I've been in the music industry, I've met a lot of people, but everybody is replaceable. It's all about if you want it, you've got to keep going. You can never get too comfortable in music because you can easily be replaced," Delgado said.

A combination of talent, technology, networking, meeting the right people in the industry, along with using social media and the internet wisely, can make a successful music production career, even from a Russellville bedroom.

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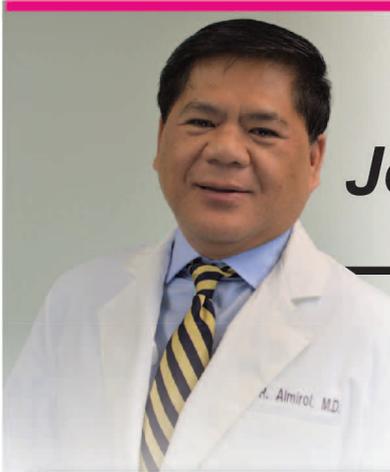
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Smith embraces RHS baseball success, looks to build on it in first season

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As Jess Smith prepares for his first season as Russellville High School's varsity baseball coach, he's not intimidated by taking over a back-to-back state championship program.

If RHS' success under former Coach Chris Heaps is the 'elephant in the room,' Smith is just fine with embracing it. And he'll walk that elephant right in front of his young team.

"My message to them is we've got a lot of guys who are going to be new faces in this program, but the bar of our program stays the same and what we're working on is getting above that bar," Smith said. "There are a lot of new names I believe will be big time contributors this season.

"That success is a huge piece of our program. But no one can just be satisfied with the success of the past. These kids we have playing now can vividly remember being up in the stands as young children watching Cody Greenhill go seven scoreless innings in a state semifinal game. And that builds the desire for them to live out that legacy as well," Smith added.

Smith's coaching philosophy will imprint the Golden Tiger baseball program, from the varsity to the Russellville Middle School level.

"It's easy sometimes for a middle school program to slip between the cracks. But I

See, 'SMITH,' page 15

Voss takes over helm of RMS program

Michael Rice
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville Middle School football team has a new man in charge, as Brett Voss was named head football coach and RMS Athletic Director by the Russellville City Board of Education.

Coach Voss will be leading a four-time consecutive North Alabama Conference Title team.

Voss brings 15 years of varsity and coordinator experience to the Russellville Middle School program.

As the Offensive Coordinator at Speake High School, Coach Voss lead an offensive attack that scored 33.5 points per game and played for the 2008 1A State Championship.



COURTESY PHOTO
New RMS head football coach Brett Voss

Coach Voss is a 2004 graduate of Speake High School.

As a student, Voss first

wanted to go into the medical field but his high school football coach, Heath Grimes,

persuaded him to pursue teaching and coaching.

Since joining the Russellville Football Program, Coach Voss has been part of 91 wins, four region championships, and 10 playoff appearances.

In 2022, Voss mentored RHS quarterback Harrison Burch to Honorable Mention All-State recognition, and 1st Team All Area and 1st Team All Region honors.

Burch threw for over 2,500 Yards and 27 TD to just four interceptions.

Coach Voss was hired by former RHS coach Michael Jackson in 2011 as a quarterback coach. He moved up through the ranks to offensive coordinator

See, 'VOSS,' page 13

RHS boys set to host 5A Area 15 Tournament

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville boys varsity basketball team rallied late to secure a home win over Red Bay on January 30th.

Coach Patrick Odom's team trailed for much of the game before coming alive in the fourth quarter to earn a double digit win, 53-43.

Malachi Duncan and Gavin Hyde led the Golden Tigers with 13 points apiece. Red Bay's top scorers were BP Blair (12 points) and Lawson Glover (10 points).

The Golden Tigers finished the week with a road win at Central and an 80-76 loss at Florence. Russellville finished the regular season 16-10.

As the 5A Area 15 champions, the Golden Tigers will host the Area Tournament which

begins February 7th.

RUSSELLVILLE GIRLS 54-RED BAY 30: The Russellville girls varsity rolled over Red Bay last week 54-30.

The Golden Tigers trailed 9-8 after one quarter. Russellville took a five-point lead, 19-14, at halftime, and pulled away in the third, outscoring the Tigers 17-5.

Ella Copeland led the Golden Tigers with 15 points, followed by Anna Beth Oliver's 13 points. Laila Hill and Jacey Moore had 10 apiece for Russellville.

Jaycee Vinson was high point player, with 11, for Red Bay. Kaylie Lindley added 10.

BELGREEN 46-RUSSELLVILLE GIRLS 43: Coach Jermaine Groce's team held a five-point halftime lead, but could not hold on in the final eight minutes as the Golden Tigers lose another late game lead to fall to Belgreen 46-43.

See, 'RHS,' page 12

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'RHS,' from Page 11

Belgreen outscored Russellville 13-6 in the fourth quarter. Belgreen was led by Dakota Green's 21 points. Noelle Willingham added 11. The Golden Tigers' leading scorer was Copeland, with 15. Moore added 10 and Avery Watts had seven.

RUSSELLVILLE GIRLS 63-CENTRAL 45: Russellville used a 15-6 third quarter en route to an impressive 63-45 road win Thursday at Central Florence.

Copeland and Hill were high scorers for both teams, with 19. Oliver had 11 and Avery Watts eight.

FLORENCE 61-RUSSELLVILLE GIRLS 52: In a game that looked like a first half blowout, the Golden Tigers rallied in the second half but still lost on the road at Florence.

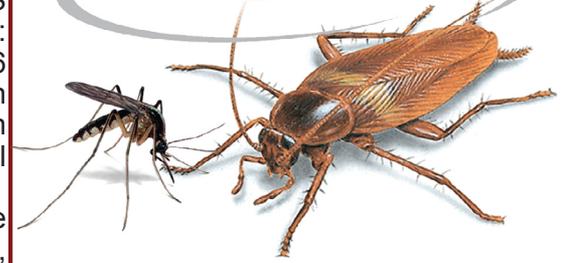
The Falcons led 20-5 after one quarter, and 37-20 at halftime.

Russellville outscored Florence 15-9 in the third quarter and 17-15 in the final eight minutes to narrow the gap.

Moore led the Golden Tigers with 22 points.

Russellville, 11-16, played West Point in the 5A Area 15 Tournament Tuesday evening.

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'VOSS,' from Page 11

and served the last three years for Coach John Ritter as associate head coach.

"It's not your typical middle school program. It's right there with your typical 2A or 3A (varsity) program as far as how it's managed," Voss said.

"Tradition of excellence is not just a slogan. It's what we live by and I can't wait to continue that excellence in the middle school program," Voss added.

Voss is married to Olivia Voss from Cullman, and the couple has an 18-month old son, Barrett.

"I believe this is a great hire for our middle school football program," Russellville School Superintendent Heath Grimes said. "Coach Voss has been with the Golden Tiger program more than 12 years and he

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"Bringing him from inside our system and program to lead the middle school program will prove to be very beneficial, to not only the middle school program, but the varsity program as well," he added.

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'SMITH,' from Page 11

remember one outstanding piece of advice from Coach Heaps—The two most important people in a program are the head coach and the middle school coach. That has to be as much of a priority as the varsity program,” Smith said.

Skyler Kirchner will serve as RMS head coach, with Luke Baker as the assistant coach.

“Coach Kirchner and Baker do an outstanding job. I believe they are the hardest working middle school coaches in the state,” Smith said. “They will work hard to equip their players with the work ethic and determination it takes to be successful.

“That work ethic will be stressed daily. We’re going to attack every single day we have available and in every rep our kids take from seventh grade through their senior year. The expectation for them is to win, but it’s okay to fail sometimes. It’s not ok not to learn, though. Failure is okay but it’s unacceptable not to learn from their mistakes,” Smith added.

Smith’s coaching staff includes Associate Head Coach Jay Stanley and Pitching Coach Richard Maggerise. Justin Sappington will serve as Junior Varsity Head Coach and Austin Kitterman Assistant JV Coach.

And that work ethic Smith describes applies to him as well. It’s something he learned during his days as an assistant coach at RHS under Heaps from 2017-2019.

“I always admired and respected him as the hardest working coach in the business, but after being around him, I adopted the philosophy that he is the hardest working, but I wasn’t going to allow him to outwork me,” Smith said. “That has a lot to do with the work ethic he instilled in me.”

Between the lines, the Golden Tigers have a trio of pitching arms Smith will count on this season, including Banks Langston, Logan White and Brayden Spurgeon.

“They all had impressive off seasons,” Smith said. “Each of them are very well equipped with varsity experience and were part of the state championship run last season. Banks and Logan have been part of two state championship runs.

“Banks has matured. He got in the weight room, put on 20 pounds and has seen a significant increase in his fastball velocity. He always had the off-speed stuff. Now he’s got an electric fastball to match that offspeed,” Smith added.

Smith describes White as an “elite competitor with plus plus pitches in his entire arsenal.” White will rely on his fastball, change up and breaking ball to rack up outs this season.

Spurgeon has “one of the best offspeed pitches in the state with his breaking ball,” Smith said. And he’ll mix in a fastball with a good arm side run, so that movement will make it difficult on opposing hitters.



RHS varsity baseball coach Jess Smith with his girlfriend Kesley Murphy.

Defensively, there will be new faces in the middle of the infield. Brandt Cummings will play shortstop, and Daniel Askew middle infield as well.

“Those two guys have an extremely high level of defense with plus arms,” Smith said. “Brandt and Daniel are guys in the lineup who can do a lot of things. They’re specialist guys who get on base a ton and have the ability to drive in runners and move runners in the short game.”

When Spurgeon is on the mound, Smith will rely on Cayden Johns at third base.

“He’s a very high instinct baseball player with a great glove and range. His instincts allow him to be a very good player on the base paths as well,” Smith said.

First base remains undecided, as junior Seth Burns and sophomores Eli Boutwell and Neyland Baker compete for a starting role.

When he’s not pitching, Langston will hold down center field for the Golden Tigers.

“He’ll be on the mound a lot for us, so we’ll look at junior Brodie Vandiver being a big outfield piece, whether he’s an everyday lineup guy or fills the role of Banks or Logan when they are on the mound,” Smith said.

Junior Michael Schofield will also be in the outfield rotation and Smith will count on him for offensive support as well.

Shayden Romans will be a fixture behind the plate.

“In my opinion, he’s one of the most talented ‘throw and block’ guys in the state and one of the best behind the plate I’ve seen,” Smith said.

As for the Golden Tigers’ schedule, Smith will continue his philosophy he developed as Scottsboro High School’s varsity baseball coach. Play the best to become the best.

Russellville’s schedule includes 7A Florence, then two games on President’s Day at Oxford High School. That will be followed by a trip to Mobile to face powerhouse Faith Academy and Saraland. The Golden Tigers will take part in the Perfect Game High School Showdown March 3-5 in Desoto Central, Miss.

“These are schools equipped with a lot of big time names and coaches with great players,” Smith said. “I think it’s important for the success of the program to give your kids that experience on a weekly basis.

“When it comes playoff time, there’s no overwhelming sense of opponents being too big or an environment being too big,” he added.



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