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2022 RHS grad Madeline Cooper crowned Miss UNA

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

It may have come a month late, but for University of North Alabama junior Madeline Cooper, the wait for the Miss UNA pageant was well worth it, as she was crowned the 49th Miss UNA in the 50th year of the event.

Originally set for January 20th, the program was rescheduled to February 16th due to severe winter

weather, ice and impassable roads the week it was supposed to take place.

Cooper, a 2022 Russellville High School graduate, is the daughter of Matt and Greta Cooper of Russellville. Her two brothers, Bryson and Jack, are both students in the Russellville system. Cooper is a secondary education major with a focus in social science.

UNA officials could not have select-

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Three-hour RCS board meeting reveals three finalists for vacant RHS football head coaching position

John Pilati
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education held a three-hour work session Monday afternoon with the lion's share of the meeting related to the vacant varsity football head coaching position at Russellville High School.

The board's February business meeting was set for Tuesday, February 20th, but it was not known as of press time whether the board would hire one of the finalists for the position or table the hiring until a later meeting.

RHS Principal Jeremy Madden presented a thorough and detailed power point presentation on the three finalists he and RCS Superintendent of Education Heath Grimes selected.

The FFP has learned there were 19 applications filed for the vacancy, which came open when John Ritter resigned as Golden Tiger head football coach on January 23, 2024, to take the same position at Decatur High School.

The job was posted that day, and applications were accepted through January 31st. Although several more individuals reached out to

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Garry W. Orrick, age 76, of Russellville, passed away on Thursday, February 15, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

Nelda Cooper Whitlock, age 77, of Russellville, passed away on Friday, February 16, 2024. The visitation will be 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Thursday, February 22, 2024, at Spry Memorial Chapel.

Ray Junior McCarley, age 76, of Phil Campbell, passed away on Sunday, February 18, 2024. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family.

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CURTIS BAKER
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Letter to Editor: Alabama public education funding in peril

Dear Editor:

The most important contribution that we can give our children is a good education. Education is the foundation and common denominator that will determine the quality of life that our society has. Without good doctors, law makers, engineers and informed leaders, the State of Alabama would wilt away. There is not a job that anyone can do who cannot read and write. The State is now considering a voucher program that has brought controversy among our Legislation.

The Democratic Legislative has once again released their objections to the Republican Party's intent to pass a law creating a school voucher program. The Republicans want to take money from our underfunded public schools and give it to private schools. There is also no requirement to meet the rigid standards of the Alabama Literacy Act or the Alabama Numeracy Act. These private schools and homeschool parents will get taxpayer's money intended to educate Alabama children with no strings attached.

Under the Alabama Accountability Act, taxpayers can decide if they want to fund private schools. There is little accountability in this law that will ensure the funds are used as they should be and are directed to the student's needs and not to parents looking for an easy way to finance their lifestyle. According to the AEA, (Alabama Educational Association), the Alabama Accountability Act is just a gateway to vouchers without oversight. If there is no accountability for the funding it will make a major milestone for community schools in Alabama.

Draining the funding from our local schools could mean fewer math and reading coaches, cuts into the extracurricular activities, loss of STEM programs, among other programs. Money that could be taken

from the Alabama Education Trust Fund would also have a negative effect on our teacher's retirement. The Alabama Education Association stated that the bill lacks accountability and would rob public schools of much needed funding.

Alabama Republicans and Democrats are so far apart that they cannot even agree on the appropriate term for the subject. Republicans call it "school choice." The Democrats call it a "voucher scheme." Democrat Rep Barbara Drummond from Mobile said that she wanted to clear up what she called the confusion about what Republicans call "school choice." "They're not choice, y'all," Drummond said. "They're vouchers. Let's be clear about our position. The Alabama House Democrats support increased investments in public education because it is the greatest and most equitable and proven path toward lifelong achievement, greater earning potential, and overall well-being."

The Republicans tried to create an education savings account last year where parents would receive \$6,900 annually which is an estimated cost for public education per student that would pay for private school, home school, and other education related costs. This bill did not pass, however Republicans in the State House and Senate now support this idea. The Democrats stand firm that this will defund public education and use taxpayer's money to increase the profit for private schools. This would benefit those who can already afford private education and ignore the needs of funding to public schools in rural areas where financially struggling families, and children with disabilities need the funding for academic achievement.

Alabama Democratic Party Chairman Randy Kelly believes that if money is diverted from public schools that it will undermine the improvement in and accountability for the State's struggling schools, especially in the rural areas of Alabama. He also stated that most of the private sector schools were attended by children from privileged families who could afford the high cost of the tuition, while middle class and poor families in Alabama had no choice but to send their children to public schools.

Alabama Republican Chairman John Wahl had a different opinion and is at odds with the AEA. "So we're looking at issues like banning critical race theory, school choice, transparency in curriculum and other issues that kind of address our children in Alabama being taught what their parents want them to be taught." Alabama Democratic Party Chairman Randy Kelly responded with "Just teach the truth."

Lynda Kirkpatrick
Marion County Democratic Party Chair
Alabama Democratic Party SDEC Rep District 17

Franklin Free Press

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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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Mon-Thur
8-5



TVA offering grants and guidance to local schools through EnergyRight program

Submitted

Other than making payroll, most schools spend more money on their utility bills than any other expense. That's why the Tennessee Valley Authority is offering its School Uplift program—a chance for schools to receive grant funds and guidance on how to reduce their monthly energy costs.

Tom Irwin is a TVA Energy Coach and says most schools save at least 10 percent after participating in the program. "It's about changing behavior and increasing awareness," he said. "And it's a friendly competition as well. Every school that completes the program receives a \$10,000 learning environment grant and the 10 most engaged schools receive \$25,000."

This year's program features about 106 schools across the seven-state region and TVA is currently recruiting next year's cohort. "It's kind of a guided program because we've put together an energy team," said Irwin. "I have three other coaches I work with and we work with those schools to set goals as far as energy efficiency efforts. We help them track their progress throughout the year and then at the end of the year they publish their results and communicate how to be an energy leader in cooperation with their local electric company who provides that local support."

Participating schools receive training throughout the year. "We have five workshops spread out the school year and for next year's schools we're going to be having a kickoff workshop later this spring to help teachers get their teams in place before next fall," Irwin said.

"As a coach, I reach out to each of all of my schools I work with at least once a month to talk about what's working and what needs to be improved. We have our engineers going into each of these schools over the summer and putting together a list of opportunities in each school—no cost or low cost opportunities to lower their bills," he added.

Many students take what they learn from at school home. "Turning off the lights when you leave the room, setting back thermostats, and we engage the kids," Irwin said. "And the parents really appreciate it when the kids remind them maybe of things that mom and dad have been trying to get them to do all along."

You can learn more about TVA School Uplift at www.energyright.com and local schools can contact local utility providers to apply for next year's program.



FRANKLIN COUNTY COMMISSION

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The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s):

Equipment Maintenance Technician II, Franklin County Highway Department

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until the position has been filled.

Heavy Equipment Operator, Franklin County Solid Waste

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, March 1, 2024.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, by calling (256) 332-8850 or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

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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.

AshaKiran 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. Consultations are free and confidential, and available in 45 different languages.

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.

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.

The Frog Pond Volunteer Fire Department is holding a fund raiser Gun Raffle with proceeds going to benefit the Frog Pond VFD. Tickets are \$10 or \$25 for 3 and may be purchased through Cash App or PayPal. Call 256-263-0825 for more information. One AR-15 and one Glock 19 Gen 5 will be given away. 16" AR-15 5.56/223 with 15" MHR. And Glock 19 Gen 5 9mm. Drawing will be held at the Fire Department on February 23, 2024, at 6 p.m.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES, RUSSELLVILLE, AL, 104 E. Lawrence St., Pastor Pearl Shelton, would like to invite you to our weekly Prayer Meeting every Monday evening at 5:30 p.m. Come join us as we pray together in unity and power! Anyone needing prayer please be sure to join us! Everyone is welcome!

Community Action Partnership of North Alabama is now taking applications for Head Start and Early Head Start. Give your child a head start on kindergarten readiness. No-cost services for eligible families in a classroom setting, programs for children ages birth through four years old, priority points for children in specific need categories and prenatal services for pregnant women teens. Call 256-331-0162 for an appointment today.

Blue Springs Volunteer Fire Department will host a Franklin County Candidate Bean Supper on Saturday, Feb. 24, from 12-4 p.m., at the fire department located at 3001 Hwy. 75, Phil Campbell. \$5 per plate includes beans, cornbread, onion and drink. Plates served at 12 p.m. Cake auction at 1 p.m., Candidate speeches to follow auction.

The Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host a Ladies Conference with speaker Katrina Coffman on Friday, March 8th at 6 p.m. This year's theme is "Showers of Blessings." Music and meal provided. The Cowboy Church is located at 25100 Hwy. 24, Russellville. Everyone is welcome.

Cowboy Church of Franklin County will host its annual Egg Rodeo on Saturday, March 23, from 10 a.m. -2 p.m., at the church located at 25100 Hwy. 24 in Russellville. Egg hunt, stick horse competition, lunch served. All events will be in arena, so dress to get dirty.



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In The March 5, 2024

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Managing Your Persistent Fears and Anxieties

Stan Popovich
Special to the Franklin Free Press

Are you looking for all of the answers on how to reduce your persistent fears and anxieties?

Fear and anxiety can ruin your life if you do not know how to overcome it.

As a result, here is a brief list of techniques that a person can use to help manage their everyday anxieties, stresses, and fears.

1. Take your fears apart: When facing a current or upcoming task that overwhelms you with a lot of anxiety, divide the task into a series of smaller steps and then complete each of the smaller tasks one step at a time. Completing these smaller activities will make the stress more manageable and increases your chances of success.

2. Take a break: Sometimes we get stressed out when everything happens all at once. When this happens, take a deep breath and try to find something to do for a few minutes to get your mind off of the problem. A person can get some fresh air, listen to some music, or do

an activity that will give them a fresh perspective on things.

3. Get all of the facts of the situation: Gathering the facts of a certain event can prevent us from relying on exaggerated and fearful assumptions. By focusing on the facts, a person can rely on what is reality and what is not. This is a great way to take control of your mental health.

4. Use Self-Visualization: Sometimes, we can get anxious over a task that we will have to perform in the near future. When this happens, visualize yourself doing the task in your mind. For instance, you have to play in the championship volleyball game in front of a large group of people in the next few days. Before the big day comes, imagine yourself playing the game in your mind. By doing this, you will be better prepared when the time comes.

5. You can't predict the future: While the consequences of a particular fear may seem real, there are usually other factors that cannot be anticipated and can affect the results of any situation. We may be ninety-nine percent correct in predicting the future, but all it takes is for that one percent to make a world of difference.

6. Think of a red stop sign: At times, a person might encounter a fearful thought that may be difficult to manage. When this happens, visualize a red stop sign, which can serve as a reminder to stop thinking about that thought. Regardless of how scary the thought may be, do not dwell on it. This technique is great in dealing with your negative thinking and will help reduce your fears.

7. Get some help: Sometimes, it helps to be able to talk to someone about your stressful situations. Talking to a trusted friend, counselor, or clergyman can give you additional advice and insights on how to deal with your current problem. Overcoming fear and anxiety takes practice. In time, you will become better able to deal with your stressful problems.

BIOGRAPHY

Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" which covers a variety of techniques that can drastically improve your mental health. For more information, please visit Stan's website at <http://www.managingfear.com>



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For updates on news and sports throughout the week, don't forget to visit us online at www.franklinfreepress.net!

'FOOTBALL,' From Page 1

inquire about the job, only 19 officially submitted applications.

Former RHS varsity football coach Perry Swindall was not among the applicants, though Swindall's name surfaced as having interest in the position last week, according to multiple sources familiar with the hiring process. Swindall was in town last Friday with representatives from the Alabama High School Sports Hall of Fame to film a video to be played at his induction into the Hall later this year.

After reviewing the 19 applications, Grimes and Madden narrowed the field to five applicants, each of whom was interviewed earlier this month.

Those candidates included former Auburn star and National Football League player Sammie Coates, Buckhorn High School varsity coach Matt Patterson, former Pike Road High School varsity coach Patrick Browning, former West Point, Mississippi varsity coach Chris Chambless and Thompson High School assistant coach Dustin Goodwin, son of former RHS varsity football coach Doug Goodwin.

After the interviews were completed, Madden and Grimes narrowed the five to three: Browning, Chambless and Goodwin.

Madden prepared a video presentation for each candidate, including resume, coaching record, television interviews, proposed salary information and whether each candidate would want to serve as RCS Athletic Director, which carries a \$6,000 supplement on top of salary and coaching stipend.

The candidates were presented in alphabetical order, and not in order of preference. In fact, Madden made a point not to make a recommendation to the board, telling board members "we feel we have three very good candidates to present to you."

The coaching search has been complicated somewhat by the fact that Grimes will retire from his superintendent position this June.

Board policy for personnel moves normally involves the superintendent, after consultation with the principal of the school having the job opening, making a recommendation to the board at a business meeting, but Grimes said he wanted to wait until the board 'had a consensus' to make a recommendation on the new coach.

The sometimes awkward three-hour meeting saw board members address concerns, questions and comments about each of the three finalists. Alabama law prevents any vote from being taken at a work session, so board members were prohibited from reaching any consensus.

While Madden never made any recommendation at the work session, Grimes said he was most impressed with Browning, who built a brand new football program at Pike Road in 2018 into the 5A state champion in 2021. But Grimes said he did not recommend Browning because he did not feel that was the direction the board wanted to take.

"I don't want to recommend anyone to you at the board meeting if he is going to be voted down," Grimes said. "I don't think it's fair to these candidates to be put in that situation and be voted down."

That left Chambless, whose West Point teams won seven state titles in his 17 years there, and Goodwin, who began his coaching career as an assistant at Russellville, as the final two.

Two board members, Greg Trapp and Howard Hillman, Jr., expressed interest in having both Goodwin and Chambless return to campus so board members could meet them.

"Each of them needs to spend some time with us," Trapp said of the two finalists.

"I think we need to know more about these coaches," Hillman said.

But Grimes responded by stressing the importance of getting the new head coach hired as soon as possible.

"We've had them up here two times already and I don't want to put anyone in a situation where they come back and then we don't hire them," Grimes said.

"My plan is to recommend Dustin Goodwin at tomorrow morning's board meeting, unless you want to wait to make a decision. It may sound crazy not to recommend a coach who has seven state championships, but I believe Dustin Goodwin is the best fit for Russellville," Grimes added.

Grimes also shared concerns about the board delaying a hire, saying it could lead to players and coaches leaving Russellville due to the uncertainty of who will lead the football program.

The job posting stated applicants should "be properly certified for the position and successful head coaching experience is preferred."

Chambless' 17 years at West Point saw his teams go 208-54, with a 48-11 playoff record and a 110-11 record in region/area play.

He previously applied for the Russellville job in 2011, when Michael Jackson was hired. Chambless went on to win four consecutive state titles from 2016-2019 at West Point. His father Rick owns Spry Memorial Chapel in Russellville.

Goodwin has seven years' experience as a head coach, four at Chelsea and three at Plainview. His combined record is 36-39, with an 0-5 playoff record and a 24-19 record in region games.

He currently serves as wide receivers coach at 7a powerhouse Thompson, whose four-year run as state champion ended with a loss in the 7a finals last fall. Goodwin has earned a reputation as a talented offensive coach, as evidenced by Thompson hiring him in 2022.

'COOPER,' From Page 1

ed a better ambassador to represent the university over the next year. Participating in the Miss UNA event has been a goal for Cooper since she was nine years old.

"In 2012, (RHS graduate) Anne Marie Hall was named Miss UNA and I was her Rising Star," Cooper said. "I was nine and we did a dance routine together. That's when I decided I wanted to do the Miss UNA pageant."

Rising Stars is a program of the Miss Alabama pageant through which Miss UNA participants serve as mentors for young ladies ages 7-11. The program gives the young girls exposure to what contestants experience in the program with the idea it will help them learn what's involved in taking part in the event.

Cooper will participate in the 2024 Miss Alabama Pageant, a week long event that culminates with the crowning of Miss Alabama on June 29th. While Cooper is looking forward to Miss Alabama, there could be no experience more special than being crowned Miss UNA.

"Miss Alabama is wonderful and I'm so excited for it. I'll continue to prepare as I did for Miss UNA. But Miss UNA was my Miss America. Being Miss UNA has always been a dream of mine, so I'll continue in Miss Alabama while doing my best to continue to serve the University of Alabama," Cooper said.

Miss UNA contestants are scored in five categories: private interview, on-stage conversation, fitness, talent and evening gown. In addition to being crowned Miss UNA, Cooper also won the Outstanding Service Award for her community service initiative, the Liberty Learning Foundation.

Liberty Learning Foundation is a non-profit organization that promotes civic and character programs in secondary schools with the goal of empowering students, parents, community leaders and businesses to 'take ownership' of the future of their community and country.

Cooper participated in the program as a Russellville Middle School student and she plans to work with educational leaders in Colbert and Lauderdale Counties to bring Liberty Learning to schools in those counties.

Cooper will also use her platform as Miss UNA to encourage her fellow students to register to vote.

"That's my main goal—to encourage voter registration—and help them figure out a plan to vote. Whether that's absentee voting, moving their residency to Florence or going back home to vote, we need more young people involved," Cooper said.

She also plans to help her fellow students any way she can. It's all about her love for her university. Cooper also serves as a student ambassador in the LaGrange Society and she's a member of the University Council.

Rep. Jamie Kiel, who's known Cooper most of her life, said he's confident she will do an outstanding job representing her school.

"Madeline is one of the most energetic and driven young ladies that I know," Kiel said. "She has been a leader at UNA since she first stepped on campus. I was thrilled to be there to see her crowned Miss UNA."

Cooper performed Don't Rain on My Parade, from the 1968 Barbara Streisand movie Funny Girl for the talent portion of the pageant.

Miss UNA debuted in 1974, and to celebrate the 50th year of the event, past winners were invited to come to Norton Auditorium to be honored as part of the 2024 pageant.

Cooper is a member of Phi Mu and her sorority was well-represented Friday night as nine of the 17 Miss UNA contestants are Phi Mu members.

Because there was no 2020 pageant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cooper became the 49th, and not the 50th, Miss UNA.

In addition to the opportunity to represent her university at Miss Alabama, Cooper won a one-year tuition scholarship and a Miss UNA custom designed ring.



COURTESY PHOTO

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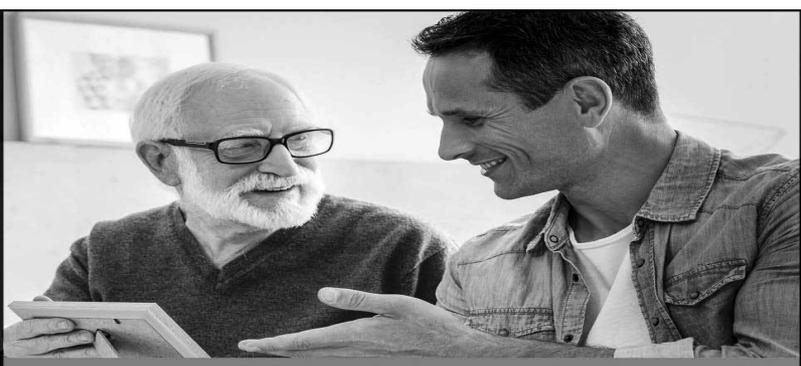
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Ramsay ends Russellville's boys' varsity playoff run in regional semifinal

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The season ended Friday morning for the Russellville High School boys varsity basketball team with a 74-43 loss to 5A power Ramsay in the Northwest Regional Semifinals held at Wallace State Community College.

The lopsided 31-point loss didn't reflect how hard Coach Patrick Odom's team played, as Russellville turned a 22-point deficit into only 11 with a third quarter 10-0 rally.

After a time out, though, the Rams closed out the quarter on a 12-0 run to build a 59-36 lead going into the final eight minutes.

Russellville finished 18-6, having won the 5A Area 15 Region Championship and its sub-regional playoff game against Wenonah before running into a talented, fast, athletic team in Ramsay.

The Rams, 22-8, advance to the regional finals to be played February 19th.

Ramsay jumped out to a 6-0 lead, thanks in part to consecutive turnovers on Russellville's first two possessions.

Ramsay led 18-11 after one quarter. Although Russellville trailed at halftime 40-23, the first half ended with an impressive rebound and dunk by EJ King, who led the Golden Tigers with 21 points. Only four Golden Tigers scored. KJ Murray had a good game with 14. Jah Williams and Bralynn Vincent had four apiece.

Ramsay's swarming full-court pressure over-

See, 'PLAYOFF,' Page 13

RHS senior quarterback Harrison Burch inks with Kentucky Wesleyan to continue football career

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

Family, friends, coaches, and classmates filled the Touchdown Club atop the Russellville Field House for senior Golden Tiger quarterback Harrison Burch, who signed to play football for Kentucky Wesleyan College on Feb. 15th.

Officially committed to the Panthers since May of 2023, Burch knew the day he put pen to paper would come, but that didn't make the day any less momentous for him and his family.



COURTESY PHOTO

See, 'BURCH,' page 14

RHS boys varsity soccer team tops Mars Hill 2-0 in season opener

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville boys' soccer team opened its 2024 campaign with a win on February 13th, defeating the Mars Hill Panthers 2-0 at Golden Tiger Stadium.

After a slow start to the game for last year's 5A quarterfinalists, the Golden Tigers found their footing and scored goals on either side of halftime to secure the win.

"The first 20 minutes I thought were extremely sloppy," said Russellville head coach Trey Stanford, now in his eighth season. "We played kind of sluggish and slow. The last 20 minutes of the first half and the second half I felt like we played much better."

Even during that initial "sloppy" spell, Russellville managed to find the opening goal. In the ninth minute a dinked ball into the box from Brian Lara fell into the path of Manny Martinez, who connected on the half volley to send the ball into the top right corner of the net.

"(Martinez) has been a staple for us now for two or three years," Stanford said. "He's been with us since he was in the eighth grade, and he actually played in the state championship. Just a great dude, great player, great athlete."

Martinez also played a role in Russellville's second goal, which came in the 67th minute.

See, 'SOCCER,' Page 12

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'SOCCER,' From Page 11

Martinez's pass found the run of Hailezgy Tekle in space on the right flank. Cutting inside and running into the box, Tekle beat his defender and the goalie with a shot that found the far side netting.

"Hailezgy is a younger guy, a good player, who's going to be a key player this year and the next couple years," Stanford said.

The Golden Tigers, ranked No. 6 in Class 5A, ended the game with over 20 shots and had 12 shots on goal. But for some brilliant saves and vital interventions by the Mars Hill defense, the score could have been more lopsided.

"We had some really good shots," Stanford said. "(Mars Hill) has a good keeper. He made some great saves. He laid out and dove for two (saves) that were absolutely awesome."

In defense, Russellville starting goalkeeper Miguel Andres was only forced into making two saves. The Panthers' speed caused the Golden Tigers to look vulnerable at times to the counterattack, but the backline was able to recover and clear up most of the danger. Russellville maintained most of the possession in the game and was widely successful in

keeping Mars Hill pinned back in its own half.

The win will provide Russellville with some momentum, but in assessing Tuesday night's performance, Stanford said there are facets of the game his squad need to focus on improving. Possession, winning the ball in the midfield, and communication are some of the areas he highlighted.

Whereas many other teams in the state, like Mars Hill, already had multiple games under

their belts, this was Russellville's first taste of real action. Stanford said playing games will aid in the team's development and chemistry going forward.

"We're still learning each other, sort of," he said. "We've practiced a lot but it's hard to get that (game) intensity in practice. You can practice all these drills, drills, drills, and you can scrimmage, but there's no substitute for games."

Up next, Russellville will face one of its biggest tests of the season when the Florence Falcons come to Golden Tiger Stadium. Florence is 7A's eighth-ranked team in the latest coaches' poll.

"You either win or you learn from it, so that's what's going to happen next Tuesday (against Florence)," Stanford said. "Against a team of a caliber like that, if we can play with them then we know we can play against anyone in the state

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their belts, this was Russellville's first taste of real action. Stanford said playing games will aid in the team's development and chemistry going forward.

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'PLAYOFF,' From Page 11

Ramsay shot 50% from the floor, making 32 of 64 attempts, while the Golden Tigers connected on 18 of 46 field goal attempts for 39%.

Jayden Williams led Ramsay with 24 points and two other Rams finished in double figures in points.

The fourth quarter saw Ramsay outscore the Golden Tigers 15-7 as Russellville's shooting woes continued.

Friday's game marked the final game for six Golden Tiger seniors, KJ Murray, Gavin Hyde, Malachi Duncan, Amir Williams and Michael Young.



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'BURCH,' From Page 11

"It doesn't feel real," Burch said. "Me and my family have put in a lot to get here, and it doesn't feel real that this step has happened. But it means a lot to me, and I think it means even more to my family.

His name will be the one on this headline, but Burch was quick to show his appreciation for the selflessness of his family, which he said helped him get to where he is.

"They have sacrificed so much of their time, and if you ask them, they're not sacrificing anything. That's their attitude towards it," he said. "They're investing their time into me to make me a better man and a better football player."

Burch, a two-year starter for the Golden Tigers, racked up a number of awards and honors for his on-field performances. He was a two-time All-Region and All-Area selection and was an All-State Honorable Mention in 2022. Burch threw for 1,766 yards and 15 touchdowns to just three interceptions his senior season. He finished his prep career with 4,290 passing yards, 42 touchdowns, and just seven interceptions. The 2023 team captain was also good on his feet and finished as the team's second-leading rusher this past season.

Former Russellville head coach John Ritter, who won two 5A Region 8 championships with Burch under center, was in attendance at the signing ceremony and praised Burch for his ability, his work ethic, and his leadership.

"Every bit of credit that he got he deserved it because he earned it," Ritter said. "What a hard-working kid and a good teammate. He was a very pivotal part of, you know, our success offensively which has been pretty doggone good the last few years."

"He was a guy that held his teammates to a high standard, but at the same time he showed them love and appreciation. There's a fine line you have to balance being a leader, and I thought he balanced

that really well," he added.

Ritter said Burch has all the intangibles necessary for him to thrive in the collegiate ranks.

"He'll probably be very, very successful," he said. "His football IQ is high, but he's a smart and driven kid off the football field, too, which is important. He'll make good decisions that'll lead to results at the next level."

Burch's excellence at Russellville wasn't limited to the field. He boasts a weighted grade-point average of 4.24, according to high school principal Jeremy Madden. Madden lauded Burch in front of his peers for his willingness to push himself in the classroom and take on advanced courses. Burch's academic record sets a great example for all student-athletes hoping to advance to the college level, Madden said. In today world of college football, the recruiting process can be extensive and time-consuming. It can be both exciting and stressful and sometimes just as competitive and chaotic as the actual games.

Burch, in declaring his commitment to Kentucky Wesleyan College last May, said the decision allowed him to better focus on his senior season without the distraction and noise that recruitment can create.

"The recruiting process is very tough for everyone. It was especially tough for me," he said. "It most definitely took the pressure off of me."

Why did Burch decide to take his talents to Kentucky Wesleyan? From the very beginning, Burch said, the coaching staff there made him feel comfortable and treated him as a person, not just a line on a roster.

"The main reason I committed is because of that coaching staff. They are phenomenal," Burch said. "I think I found a home that really, really loves me for who I am. I'm not just a number on a sheet."

Over the last few years Burch has been developing a connection with Kentucky Wesleyan head coach Tyrone Young, who also coaches the quarterbacks, and that relationship was also a key factor in his decision.

"I have been creating a bond with Coach Young ever since my sophomore summer," Burch said. "He is just a great man. From everything I've seen he's a Christian man. He fears God, and that is something I strive to be. So he's just a really good role model."

Soon enough Burch will be packing his bags for Owensboro, Kentucky, to join a class of 65 signees. And he plans on bringing some of what he learned while wearing the black and gold of the Golden Tigers with him. A sense of work ethic will be in that metaphorical suitcase.

"The only person that beats you is you," he said. "You get exactly what you put in, out. The workouts (at Russellville) are crazy hard, the conditioning is crazy hard, but you feel it in the fourth quarter."

"You put in the work already and you know what you can do. You're elevating your confidence level and your comfort level and whenever things go bad you can always fall back on that," he added.

Perhaps another bit of Russellville, a school that traditionally holds its athletic programs to high standards, that Burch will carry with him are expectations. When asked what his expectations were for himself when he dons the purple and white this fall, Burch didn't hedge:

"This might sound a little cocky, but I expect to start," he said.

"They've got some good quarterbacks, don't get me wrong. I am very confident in my abilities as a human and a playmaker and a leader and I think that I can come in and make the team better. That's why they recruited me, that's why I'm here, so I expect to start."

A bit of swagger in a quarterback is not unheard of, after all.

College football fans will just have to wait another six months to see if Burch's expectations become reality when Kentucky Wesleyan kicks off against Northern Michigan on Sept. 5th

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Belgreen girls' season ends with 60-48 regional final loss to Marion County

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

With eight seconds left in the third quarter of its Northwest Girls Basketball 1A Semifinal game against Meek, Belgreen's Bryn Scott made a perfect pass to Makenna Fisher as she cut to the hoop for an easy layup to give her team a 38-23 lead as the quarter ended.

It was the kind of play that typifies Coach Chad Green's team—fundamental, unselfish basketball. And it's a style that's working, as Belgreen advanced with a 54-34 win to face Marion County Monday afternoon in the regional finals.

Although his team ended its season with a 60-48 loss to Marion County, Belgreen finished 24-6 and fell three wins short of a state championship.

Dacota Green led Belgreen with 22 points, going 9-19 from the floor against Marion County. Scott had 11 and Makenna Fisher scored 8.

The Lady Bulldogs trailed 20-18 after a high scoring first quarter, but the damage was done by Marion County in the second period, as Belgreen was outscored 16-5 and trailed 36-23 at the break.

Belgreen shot only 35% from the floor, compared to Marion County's 53%, including 6-17 from three-point range. The usually good-shooting Lady Bulldogs made only 8 of their 27 three-point attempts.

The loss to Marion County won't overshadow a successful season for Belgreen, though, and one that Green will remember for how well his team played together.

"It's a true team effort with this group," Green said after Wednesday's game. "We have some girls who score in double figures, but we rely so much on that defensive pressure. They're so unselfish. They each get after it and hustle. I didn't fault their effort at halftime. I just told them we need to make some layups.

"We have a deep bench with some kids who can come in and keep up the pressure and defend and that helps a lot. We can give our starters some breaks, or when they're in foul trouble those bench players come in and give us some good minutes," Green added.

The Tigers actually led 11-9 after the first quarter in what was shaping up to be a low scoring affair. But Belgreen went on an offensive tear the final four minutes of the half to take a 22-14 lead at the break.

A smothering Lady Bulldog defense forced double digit Meek turnovers as the Tigers trailed Belgreen 38-23 after three quarters.

When Dacota Green hit a layup following a steal midway through the fourth quarter, it gave Belgreen its biggest lead at 48-29.

The final two minutes of the game saw the Tigers fouling Belgreen on each possession, but the game was already out of reach even though the Lady Bulldogs missed several free throws down the stretch.

If there was any doubt remaining (and there wasn't), Scott's steal and subsequent layup and free throw made it 52-29 Belgreen with 1:24 left. That enabled Green to clear his bench and let his starters receive a well-earned ovation from the Belgreen crowd.

Fisher led Belgreen with 16 points. Green added 12, Scott 8 and Morgan Lauderdale seven points.

Students invited to enter art contest through Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts

Submitted

The deadline for entry in Artistic Renderings of Youth is March 8, 2024. This is a juried exhibit of artwork open to 7th through 12th grade students from Colbert, Franklin, and Lauderdale counties.

The exhibit opens March 20th and runs through May 3rd at Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts in Florence. The exhibit and competition are coordinated by area art teachers. Schools may participate or students can enter on their own.

Each student can enter up to three works. Entries are juried and, if accepted, are eligible for ribbons awarded in different grade level groupings. Works must be original and can be in any medium.

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For more details on entry rules, call Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts (256) 760-7379 or email: connect@florencealmuseums.com.

The Kennedy-Douglass Center for the Arts is free and open to the public Monday - Friday from 9-4 and on Sundays from 1-4. The art center is located at 217 E. Tuscaloosa St. Florence, AL and can be reached by calling 256-760-6379



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