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## Red Bay Museum, Belgreen football program beneficiaries of FCCDC quarterly grant awards

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Community Development Commission met April 5, 2024, 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. The commission 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 \$2.634 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 April 5th meeting included:

- \$1,250 to Vina High School for bathroom renovation.
- \$500 to Tharptown High School for Franklin County Special Olympics expenses.
- \$250 to Red Bay High School volleyball for equipment.
- \$1,600 to Phil Campbell

See 'FOOTBALL,' Page 8

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## TVA to focus efforts on aquatic nuisance plants

John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press

Although they are referred to as 'nuisance plants,' invasive aquatic plants are far more than just a nuisance to the health of a lake.

These invasive aquatic plants, some of which cover the lake's surface, can disrupt the ecosystem and impact the community and recreational use of the body of water. Water quality is often degraded by these nuisance plants which create conditions harmful to fish, including largemouth bass.

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Authority is committed to maintaining public access to its reservoirs by managing nuisance aquatic plants.

TVA is hosting an event April 25th to update its efforts to manage nuisance aquatic plants on Guntersville Reservoir. The challenge for biologists is to preserve the positive impacts of aquatic plants while attempting to minimize the negative impacts on recreational use.

My Lake Guntersville is a partner with the W.E.T. Foundation, a non-profit organization created to promote and preserve the ecological health of Lake Guntersville, as well as meeting the needs of as many

See 'TVA,' Page 4

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**Sarah Madge Holt, age 82, of Phil  
Campbell, Alabama passed away April  
17, 2024. Pinkard Funeral Homes assist-  
ed the family.**

**Larry Hoyet Fretwell, 75, passed away  
on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Akins  
Funeral Home assisted the family.**

**Jacob Dewayne Malone age 34 passed  
away on April 17, 2024. Akins Funeral  
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# Personnel moves highlight short meeting of Russellville City Schools BOE

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Board of Education approved 16 personnel moves at a short meeting on April 16th.

Included among those was the resignation in supplement of Skyler Kirchner, Russellville Middle School head baseball coach, effective May 23, 2024.

Other approved items included:

--Temporary Employment: Kaylee Smith, 21st CCLC Aide, Ansley Willis, Park and Recreation Department Student Worker, Sofia Tiffin, Lily Cate Pace, Lara Gunderman and Emmy Green, Park and Recreation Department Lifeguards, Elliott Green and Brennon Thorpe, student workers at Russellville Elementary School.

--Voluntary Transfer: Carol Fretwell, from temporary part-time position to temporary employment to fill Caitlin Swinney's leave of absence from March 14-May 24, 2024.

--Leave of Absence: Tina Hawkins, CNP Assistant Manager at RES.

--Resignation in Position: Sarah Brock, West Elementary School teacher and Lauren Ritter, RES teacher.

--Employment in Position: Sarah Kate Goodwin, RES teacher, Courtney Harden, Instructional Aide at RMS and Jacob Danley, physical education teacher at RHS.

--approval of a one-year preliminary Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) Contract for Austin Stidham.

--approval of a contract of employment with incoming Superintendent of Education Tim Guinn. Details of the contract were not released by the board pending Guinn's signing of the contract.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Board of Education will be Tuesday, May 21, at 8 a.m.

## Franklin Free Press

113 Washington Ave. NW  
Russellville, AL 35653  
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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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# 'TVA,' From Page 1

recreational users as possible, according to its website [www.mylakeguntersville.com](http://www.mylakeguntersville.com).

The organization recently purchased a CD3 watercraft cleaning system, which is available free for boaters to clean, drain and dry their boats to help reduce the spread of invasive plant and/or animal species.

The CD3 is a mobile watercraft cleaning unit that helps prevent boaters from transporting any species of plant or animal into nearby lakes from the one the boat was most recently used on.

The unit contains a wet/dry vacuum, air compressor, three hand tools and lighting for public use.

TVA will soon begin herbicide treatments in its reservoirs ahead of the 2024 peak recreation season. Additionally, TVA natural resource managers will be evaluating the effect of their decision to lower water levels and expose vegetation to freezing temperatures in January 2024.

The CD3 unit is free for public use. Step-by-step instructions are available through a free CD3 app.

From March-November 2023, TVA and its contractors treated more than 1,400 acres, cut and harvested more than 150 acres of aquatic plants and collected and removed more than 120,000 cubic yards of floating eel grass from the Guntersville Reservoir, all part of TVA's ongoing efforts to maximize recreational use on its waters while also protecting their ecosystems.



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# Roxy to host *Majestic: A Tribute to Journey* on May 18th

Submitted

This is the year that the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council is sponsoring monthly entertainment for the Roxy's 75th Anniversary that will be celebrated in September, the month that the Roxy Theatre first officially opened its doors to the public.

Mark your calendar for Saturday, May 18 as *Majestic: A Tribute to Journey* will be making its debut at the Historic Roxy Theatre. From Nashville, *Majestic: A Tribute to Journey* features nationally-touring musicians, led by founding lead vocalist, Shane Russell. The show is performing all over the country. The show captivates the essence of *Journey* with an energetic, crowd-pleasing, and anthem-quality performance. Every musician is a devout *Journey* fan and devotes their epic skill at recreating the passion that is *Journey*.

For more information visit *Majestic: A Tribute to Journey's* website. Tickets are \$20 and may be purchased on the Roxy Facebook page and website or at the door on the evening of the show.

Additionally, the Arts and Humanities Council has initiated a '75 for 75' Challenge as a fundraiser to allow the Roxy to show first run movies.

Donors are asked to give \$75 for the 75 years the Roxy has been opened, representing \$1 per year.

A Go Fund Me account has been set up to make donations easy. Donations in the form of a check may be mailed to the Franklin County Arts and Humanities Council, P.O. Box 384, Russellville, AL., 35653.

Board members will be reaching out to local civic organizations to explain the '\$75 for 75' Challenge. Proceeds will go toward the expenses involved in the Roxy being designated as a first-run movie theatre.



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Joseph Baldwin, District III  
David Hester, District IV  
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The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s):

**Utility Maintenance Technician, Franklin County Highway Department**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

**Corrections Officer/Dispatcher, Franklin County Jail**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

**Custodian/Housekeeper/Groundskeeper, Franklin County Courthouse**

Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until 5:00 PM on Friday, April 26, 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](http://www.franklincountyal.org) under the Careers tab.

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**T**he 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.

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

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

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

**M**Y FATHER'S HOUSE MINISTRIES, RUSSELLVILLE, AL, 104 E. Lawrence St., Pastor Pearl Shelton, would like to invite you to our weekly Prayer Meeting every Tuesday 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!

**Y**ou are invited to sign up for a free Introduction to Pickleball class, sponsored by the Russellville Parks and Recreation Department. The one-day class will take place Sunday, May 5, 2024, at 4 p.m., at the Recreation Center at 201 Ash Avenue. Spots are limited, and all equipment will be provided. The class will be taught by Joseph Murray. Please call 256-431-8382 to sign up or with any questions.

**A** Bean Supper will be held at the Frankfort Community Center on Saturday, April 27th. Serving begins around 2 p.m. Beans & ham, corn, slaw, turnip greens, cornbread, drink and dessert for \$10. FREE live music. Bring your own lawn chair. Proceeds go to the upkeep of the Frankfort Community Center. Hosted by Frankfort Extension Homemakers Club, a non-profit organization.

**I**t's that time again! Time to remove old flowers from the graves in the Mt. Pleasant Cemetery on Highway 724 near Newburg. It is also time to make that donation for cemetery maintenance. (Decoration Day is Father's Day). Please mail donations to: Mt. Pleasant Cemetery Fund, 941 Highway 87, Russellville, AL, 35653.

**O**sborn Hill Cemetery -Decoration Day will be on May 4, 2024. The first Saturday of May has been observed as Decoration Day for well over 100 years. Please make plans for that special day to come to the cemetery. If you would like to donate to the Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, please send your donations to: Osborn Hill Cemetery Fund, c/o Mrs. Lana Duncan 2330 Colburn Mtn. Road, Tuscumbia, AL 35674

**T**he Russellville High School Percussion Line presents Dinner With the Drumline! This special evening includes music from the Russellville Percussion Ensemble and a delicious dinner with 3 Birria tacos, drink and dessert. The dinner will be Thursday, May 2nd, at 6:30 p.m., at the A.W. Todd Centre. \$15 per ticket. For tickets, see a Russellville Percussion Student or contact Scott Stephenson at [Scott.Stephenson@rcs.k12.al.us](mailto:Scott.Stephenson@rcs.k12.al.us).

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**T**hartown High School's varsity football team is hosting a fundraiser Pro Wrestling event on Friday, May 3, at the high school. Front row seats are \$15, and general admission is \$10. Bell time is 7 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the THS varsity football team. Tickets are available from any THS football player, or by calling 256-410-6175. There are also sponsorship packages available for the event, with several different levels sponsorship to choose from. Call the number above to learn more about sponsorships.



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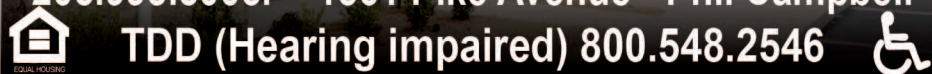
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# 'FOOTBALL,' From Page 1

Elementary for second grade Chromebooks.

--\$7,500 to Red Bay Museum for building walkways at New Railroad Park.

--\$1,500 to the Healing Place for furniture purchase.

--\$250 to Belgreen High School for archery team equipment.

--\$1,250 to Franklin County Career Tech Center for landscaping and improvement expenses to facility.

--\$2,500 to Belgreen High School for football program equipment.

--\$800 to Belgreen Fourth Grade classroom technology supplies.

--\$1,500 to Belgreen High School restroom renovation expenses in snack room.

--\$800 to Belgreen School for third grade technology expenses.

--\$2,500 to City of Russellville for Jam on Sloss Lake event sponsorship.

--\$800 to

Russellville Fire Department for fire prevention materials for Pre-K and first grade.

--\$2,000 to East Franklin Junior High for playground equipment.

--\$5,000 to Russellville High School for athletics program weight equipment.

--\$500 to Distinguished Young Women scholarship program sponsorship.

--\$6,000 transfer to the Future Economic Development Fund.

The next meeting of the FCCDC will be June 21, 2024, at 8:30 a.m., at the Franklin County Courthouse Annex. Grant requests for the June 21 2024, meeting must be received by a commission member before 12 p.m., June 14, 2024.

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# Grant awarded to improve Highway 75 over Cedar Creek

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Motorists who travel County Road 75 over Cedar Creek will soon see repairs and improvements thanks to a grant secured by Rep. Jamie Kiel as part of 'Rebuild Alabama' funds.

Franklin County Engineer Jason Baggett said his department is working to finalize plans for the project and he expects construction to begin by late summer.

Kiel said improving Alabama's roads, particularly those in House District 18, has been a legislative priority of his since he first took office.

"With so many public officials across Alabama competing for dollars to fund their local projects, I am proud to secure approval for this much-needed road improvement," Kiel said. "I will continue working to promote other important infrastructure projects throughout House District 18 as future rounds of grants are awarded."

Franklin County Probate Judge Barry Moore expressed his appreciation to Kiel for what he described as a very beneficial road project that will repair and update the existing culvert on 75 over Cedar Creek.

"We appreciate Rep. Kiel for getting this grant for Franklin County, which will be beneficial for our citizens, and we thank him for all that he does on behalf of his constituents in House District 18," Moore said.

# Morgan honored with prestigious award from Troy University

Submitted

Sarah Morgan of Muscle Shoals, was among the students recognized for outstanding achievements in academics, leadership and service during Troy University's annual Honors Convocation.



Morgan received the Phi Kappa Phi Outstanding Junior.

The Honors Convocation was held on Monday, April 15, at the Troy Campus with Troy University women's basketball head coach Chanda Rigby serving as keynote speaker.

Morgan is a 2023 graduate of Russellville High School, where she was Valedictorian. She is pursuing a degree in Cybersecurity at Troy, with a minor in Data Intelligence and Leadership Development.

# Rebuilding the Tradition brick fundraiser underway at RHS

John Pilati  
Franklin Free Press

Russellville High School Principal Jeremy Madden recently announced a new fundraiser school officials are calling Rebuilding the Tradition.

The fundraiser allows donors to purchase a personalized brick for either \$100 (4x8) or \$125 (8x8). The bricks will be placed in the new sidewalks in the former quad area near the main building.

Each brick will be personalized, so purchasers can honor a loved one, alumnus or RHS supporter, or recognize a business, graduating class, etc.

"The possibilities are endless for you to leave a legacy at RHS—purchase one for yourself as an alumni or supporter, in honor or in memory of a loved one, or purchase one in honor of your business or graduating class," Madden said.

Bricks may be purchased in person at Russellville High School during school hours or by visiting the LeanStream link listed on the school's webpage, [www.rcs.k12.al.us](http://www.rcs.k12.al.us).

"I'm very excited about our brick project that will allow our past graduates to be able to connect forever with RHS where they have so many fond memories," Madden said. "This project is going to allow us to restore the old main building and make up-to-date learning spaces for our current and future students.

"This will include more graphics and designs that are based on RHS tradition, legends and heroes," he added.



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## Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts to perform Suite Surrender this week

*Submitted*

The BTCPA announces its third and final production for the 2023-2024 season, Suite Surrender, by Michael McKeever and directed by Russellville native Anna Carol Porter.

The performance dates are April 25-27 at 7:00 PM and Sunday April 28, 2024, at 2:00 PM. Tickets are now on sale at the Weatherford Centre in Red Bay, AL between the hours of 2:00 to 4:00 PM weekdays. You can go by to purchase your tickets, or you can call and reserve them.

If you are interested in dinner theater it is available only for Thursday, April 25, 2024, and must be reserved in advance. If you are interested in bringing a group, please contact Beth Hammock at 256-668-0045.

The cast includes: Doninic Rogers, Theron Struzik, Mason Cook, Sharon Strickland, Anna Lindsey, Holly McKinney, Austin Henderson, Brandy Cook, Morgan Miller, and Brittany Faris as stage manager. Extras include: Brittany Faris, Vickie Cook, Gary McKinney, Dot Morrow and Eric Faris.

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## Sectionals next for ever-improving RHS track team

*Kadin Pounders  
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity track and field teams have made the turn and are on the straight away, so to speak, in their 2024 campaign. Following two home meets and a final regular meet at Deshler, the Golden Tigers have just the sectional meet at Scottsboro and, perhaps, a state meet in front of them.

"I really don't know the right word to describe just how proud I am of this team and these kids," Russellville head coach Chris Boatwright said. "They've been working really hard all year and really putting in a lot of time and effort and practice to get better and better every meet."

Russellville hosted two meets on April 1 and April 15. The RVL Invitational, held on the first of the month, saw both girls' and boys' teams finish in first place. The Golden Tiger girls ended the meet with 122 total points, while the boys topped the standings with 124 points. In all, Russellville finished with 15 medalists, including seven gold medal winners.

"I think we've been improving, as a team, in every meet we've been in this year, and in all the events, individual events, we're getting better times and higher jumps and longer throws," Boatwright said. "It was a goal of ours to finish first as a team, both boys and girls, in our meets this year. I was really, really proud of the kids that they were able to do that."

Among Russellville's gold medalists at the RVL Invitational were Tait Barnes, who took first in the boys' shot put and javelin; Hunter Kastberg, who won the boys' pole vault competition; Cash

**See, 'IMPROVING,' Page 13**

## Vina girls win Franklin County Track Tournament

*John Pilati  
 Franklin Free Press*

The Vina High School girls' track and field team took home the championship in the 2024 Franklin County Track Tournament held at Red Bay this week.

Coach Richie Hester's team finished first among five schools, as the Lady Red Devils earned the most points in 9 of the tournament's 17 events.

Those events included the 3200 meter run, 4x100 meter relay, 100 meter dash, 100 meter hurdles, discus, shot put, high jump, long jump and triple jump.

In the 4x100 relay, Vina's Braxtyn Quinn, Makenzie Elrod, Layla Hester and Lana Bell won the event for the Lady Red Devils.

Bell finished second in the 100 meter run.

Quinn placed third.

Elrod won the 100

meter hurdles. Bell finished second in the 200 meter run. Vina's Jayln Shotts placed second in the discus, with teammates Kaley Attaway placing third and Autumn Chandler fourth.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Vina girls' track team celebrates its Franklin County championship.

**See, 'VINA,' page 15**

## Golden Tiger boys, girls tennis teams advance to state tourney

*Kadin Pounders  
 Franklin Free Press*

The Russellville High School varsity boys' and girls' tennis teams are headed back to the state tournament after both clinched Class 4A-5A Section 8 titles last Tuesday.

Both Golden Tiger teams competed in six championship matches each—four singles and two doubles matches—and came out on top in every single one.

Russellville senior and North Alabama commit Peyton Parrish paired with Sofia Tiffin to take down second-seeded Brooks 7-5, 6-0 in the No. 1 girls' doubles championship. Kinsley Palmer and Lily Cate Pace did the same in the third flight, defeating the Brooks duo 6-4, 6-1.

Parrish, Tiffin, and Palmer were also three of Russellville's four singles champs on the girls' side. Seeded No. 3 in flight one, Parrish powered through to eventually topple the top seed, Deshler's Landen McCalpin, 7-5, 6-0.

"Peyton Parrish, my number one, has been hurt for the majority of the year, and she's only been back a couple of weeks," Russellville girls' head coach Charlotte Dollar said. "She played through a lot of pain to push through and help us get there and win another Section championship."

Tiffin, in flight two, blew past the competition in her bracket, winning both the first two rounds 6-0, 6-0 before beating Brooks' Darby Clark 6-0, 6-1 in the championship.

"Sophie Tiffin played lights out at number two. You couldn't have played any better than her. She was amazing," Dollar said.

Kinsley Palmer, seeded No. 2 in her bracket, dispatched Brooks' Anna Lee Hall 6-2, 6-0 to win her singles title, while Sarah Kate Kiel, after battling through a tiebreaker in the semifinal round, went on to win the championship in her flight 6-3, 6-0 over Deshler's Aleece Hollis.

"We had multiple who won in both singles and doubles championships," Dollar said. "Everyone's got to

**See, 'STATE,' Page 12**

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## 'STATE,' From Page 11

win (to win the Section title), so we're just so proud of them for doing that." While praising her players, Dollar also gave credit to her other coaches who have assisted in the success of the team.

"I need to say that Leanne Strickland is the most amazing coach. She has helped us all these years to get to where we are. She's a doubles specialist, and she's helped us so much to be successful in doubles matches. We wouldn't be here without her," she said. "This year we've added Lee Taylor Bishop, and she's been a big asset for us, as well."

Russellville's boys' team's doubles champions were Bralynn Vincent and Reece Carson in the No. 2 doubles championship and Malachi Duncan and Drew Strickland in flight three. The pair of Vincent and Carson sailed through their bracket, eventually taking the title from Deshler 6-0, 6-4. Seeded No. 2 in their bracket, Duncan and Strickland too faced Deshler in the final round, winning in three sets 6-4, 4-6, 10-7.

Vincent and Duncan were also among the Golden Tigers' four singles champions in the boys' tournament. The Tomas twins, Josue and David, were Russellville's other two victors. Josue Tomas faced Wilson's Noah Hetrick in an intense match that needed a tiebreaker to decide the winner. Josue, in the end, came out on top winning the third set 11-9.

David Tomas also needed a tiebreaker to beat his rival in the championship round, Deshler's Brody Black. After dropping the opening set 2-6, David came back to win the next two 6-3, 10-5.

Vincent, the third seed in his bracket, rolled through to a 6-0, 6-1 championship win over Wilson's Chandler Peters. Duncan took the first set and the tiebreaker against Freddy Franks of Wilson to round out the list of Russellville's champs.

"We had six people playing in the championships and we won all six," Phillips said. "I told the kids...if you take care of business, we'll win."

"We played four tiebreakers and we won them all. That's all the kids and their will to fight and play hard. I'm just so proud of these kids, man. I love each and every one of them," he added.

As predicted by both Russellville coaches, the tournament was a tight, competitive affair.

"It was super close," Dollar said of the girls' tournament. "Deshler and Brooks both have phenomenal teams and have been very successful this year. Brooks has been more successful this year than they've been in a long time, so we knew they would be tough. Their top three are just lights out. They are amazing players and so we feel very blessed and lucky to have been able to come out on top."

On the boys' side it was Deshler and Wilson that gave the Golden Tigers some fits.

"I mean, hats off to Deshler and Wilson. Out of the six championship matches, we played four tiebreakers," Phillips said. "This boys section has been great. Deshler is always going to be good. Wilson is good. They have great coaches, they have great players, and it seems like they're always bringing it."

It is the second straight year that both the Russellville boys' and girls' teams have won the Section 8 tournament. Dollar and Phillips both credit their respective seniors for the roles they have played in the success of their teams.

"For this particular group, I have seven seniors who have been with us for a long time, and it's amazing what they've been able to accomplish," Dollar said. "We've been to state together a bunch of times and we are really excited to be able to take them back for their senior year. They've earned it."

"My three seniors in this group, I had them in ninth grade...and I asked them if they would come out for tennis in the spring. They didn't have a sport and I challenged them to play tennis, and they all laughed about it at first, but I told them they would be able to do something special if they really took a liking to it and worked hard at it," Phillips said. "Reese Carson, this is his second year playing and he's our number one seed. Bralynn Vincent, I put him at one doubles and threw him to the wolves and he really had to battle last year to get to where he is. And Malachi Duncan, too."

"They believed what I said and they took it and ran with it. All I did was mention tennis and they did the rest. It's all them, it's all them," he added.

All that remains for Russellville is the state tournament to be held in Mobile April 22-26, and both Golden Tiger squads are striving to make an impressive showing of it. Phillips, waiting to set specific goals for the tournament, said he hopes his team can improve on a couple of top 10 finishes the last few years. Dollar said a few of her players have the ability to make a run in Mobile, but whatever happens she's excited for the journey.

"I feel like a couple of my players have a really good chance of going really deep at state. I hope one or two of them can pull off a win because it'd be amazing to have a state championship out of this bunch. And you never know, three or four of them could pull it off and we could have a team one," Dollar said. "Sometimes it's just luck of the draw. You've got to take your lumps with your good luck and see what happens. We're just really thrilled to be going again. Anything that happens down there in our favor is just icing on the cake."



# 'IMPROVING,' From Page 11

Crumpton grabbed gold in the boys' long jump; and Skyler Ergle was first in the boys' 110-meter hurdles. Avery Watts was the girls' high jump champion, Keira Cruse won in the girls' long jump and Ari Willingham took the gold medal in the girls' 200-meter race.

The Golden Tigers had similar success at their Golden Tiger Invitational on April 15. The boys' team, once again, finished first over 20 other competing schools, tallying 122 total points. The girls' team finished in second, behind Marion County, with 59 points.

"I was really impressed with the girls with the top two finishes in our home meets," Boatwright said. "More than anything I've been proud of the buy-in and their commitment. They've really put in the work, and it's paying off."

Though the Golden Tigers had just one first-place finish in the individual events—Skyler Ergle won gold in the boys' 110-meter hurdle—Russellville did end the day with 14 total medalists: 10 on the boys' team and four on the girls' team. Junior Keira Cruse, who Boatwright praised as one of the team's leading performers, secured silver in both the girls' triple jump and long jump events, while Ella Copeland and Lourdes Ellis finished second and third, respectively, in the 1600-meter run and the girls' shot put.

On the boys' side, Russellville's 10 medals were won by 10 different Golden Tigers. Besides Ergle's top finish, Mason Herring, Tait Barnes, and Jah Williams all finished second in the triple jump, javelin throw, and 110-meter hurdles, respectively. Cash Crumpton, EJ King, Shiloh Willis, Cade Parker, Hunter Kastberg, and Jeremy Winston took bronze in their respective events.

The final meet for the Golden Tigers before Section was a Deshler-hosted meet on April 19. There Russellville finished in second place in the boys' standings and fourth in the girls' standings. In all, the Golden Tigers medaled in 13 events with the likes of Keira Cruse, Tait Barnes, and Cash Crumpton winning multiple medals. Russellville's best finish was by Cruse, who won the girls' triple jump event.

Thrilled with the individual performances throughout the year, Boatwright said he was also happy with the team mentality his athletes have taken pride in.

"In track, you know, all these events are individual events, but I've really challenged them to view it as a team sport. It's an individual sport but a team sport at the same time. What you do as an individual has an impact on the team," Boatwright said. "So, yeah, go out there and give it your best shot but know that you're not just running for yourself, you're running for your team."

"You don't have to win every event you're in, but try to grab those top 10, top eight finishes and know you're gaining team points," he added. "The buy-in has been incredible."

Still, while stressing a team approach, Boatwright knows the allure of personal achievement and accolades. Over the last two years, 11 school records have been broken. It's one tool the coach uses to motivate the athletes on his team, but, Boatwright says, he doesn't have to do much motivating—they're pretty driven all on their own.

"Going into it, it wasn't a goal of mine to have kids breaking 11 school records," Boatwright said. "Some of these records have stood for a long time, but I'm seeing the times and heights some of these kids are getting and I'm like, 'You can beat this, you can break this.' I push these kids to try and grab these records. They're there for the taking."

The boys' school records broken include the 4x800-meter, the 3200-meter race record set by Pascual Felipe, the 110-meter hurdle record broken by Skyler Ergle, the 300-meter hurdle set by Eli Cooper, and the boys' pole vault record set by Hunter Kastberg. New girls' school records include the long jump and triple jump set by Keira Cruse, the high jump set by Avery Watts, Lourdes Ellis breaking the shot put record, Aleah Bonman in discus throw, and Ari Willingham setting the 100-meter record.

"I think having that goal of breaking a record, it makes kids want to be a part of it," Boatwright added. "They're really enthusiastic about it. They're excited and always looking, driving for their next PR. I'll have a kid who'll PR and be four seconds off (the record) and they'll come to me like, 'Coach, I might not get it this year, but I'm going to get it next year.' I think it's something they can get excited about. To have 11 records broken so far, that's been really cool."


Up next for the Golden Tigers is the Section meet in Scottsboro on April 26 and 27. As of April 15, Boatwright said, Russellville has had 23 Section qualifiers.

"You know, we're really excited about competing at the Section meet. There's going to be a lot of great athletes from other schools there, but watching our kids all year, I know we can go there and our kids can stack up against some of the best," Boatwright said. "With the number of our kids competing I think we've got a chance to really compete as a team. We'll try to grab top eight finishes and see how many team points we can get, see what happens."

"I'm just really proud of this team and what they've been able to do this year. It's my goal to make this thing bigger and better in the future, and, I'll be honest, I think things can only go up for this program because of these kids and how hard they work."

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# Cummings' no-hitter sweeps Golden Tigers into second round

Kadin Pounders  
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School varsity baseball team made quick work of Pleasant Grove in the opening round of the AHSAA playoffs Thursday night,



COURTESY PHOTO

run-ruling the Spartans 12-2 and 16-0 to advance in the tournament.

The Golden Tigers, ranked No. 4 in the final Alabama Sports Writers Association poll of the regular season, dominated Pleasant Grove in every aspect of the game, as the final scores suggest. Russellville put on a hitting clinic in the sweep and got a special performance on the mound in game two, extending the Golden Tigers' season for at least another week. "I said last week, you know, in the post-season it's not really a beauty contest

but, heck, tonight we made it a beauty contest," Russellville head coach Jess Smith said. "I'm just really proud of this team. We've got another week together and I'm excited about it."

The Golden Tigers went to work right away in game one, putting up four runs in the bottom of the first inning after a three up, three down top half. Two leadoff walks put Russellville in scoring position quickly, and an error allowed senior Daniel Askew to score the game's first run. Back-to-back RBI singles from Michael Scofield and Brodie Vandiver made it 3-0 and then Elliott Green scored on a wild pitch to extend the lead before the inning came to a close. A sacrifice bunt by Vandiver scored Brandt Cummings for Russellville's single run in the third before the Golden Tigers put up a massive seven-run fourth inning. Russellville opened the at-bat with four straight singles, with hits by Askew and senior Devin Green scratching three runners across. Cayden Johns, who got the start on the mound for the Golden Tigers, helped himself out and took one for the team with the bases loaded—that made it 9-2. Russellville's final three runs of the game came in the next at-bat when an Eli Boutwell single to left field cleared the bases.

Ty Engelthaler relieved Johns in the top of the fifth and shut the Spartans down with two groundouts and a strikeout to end the game. Though Russellville finished game one with nine hits and was able to trigger the mercy rule with a big fourth inning, Smith felt his team's performance, overall, was lacking a little something. "To be honest, I don't feel like we played to the standard that we want to play in game one," Smith said. "I thought it was kind of a lackadaisical approach. It's great, you know, winning in big fashion, but in postseason baseball it's not really about what you do, it's how you do it."

"My message to (the team) between games was from here on out, whoever we play in the playoffs is a nameless and faceless opponent," he said. "Your focus is on you and executing to our standard in the game that we play." The Golden Tigers clearly got the message. Russellville put together two four-run innings in the third and fourth before doubling the advantage with an eight-run fifth inning. The hosts tagged the Spartans with 12 total hits in game two and, as Smith pointed out, the timing couldn't be better for Russellville's bats to start heating up again.

"Some guys that had kind of been going cold with the sticks got going again," Smith said. "Neyland (Baker) with two big-time doubles, Brandt (Cummings) had two hits again...Johns had another three-hit day, and Michael (Scofield) had a two-hit day. Some of these guys that had cooled off here recently got back hot and that was awesome to see."

Russellville's bats were loud in game two, but the even bigger story was how quiet Pleasant Groves' were. With Brandt Cummings on the mound, the Spartan bats weren't just quiet, they were mute. The senior right-hander tossed a gem—a five-inning no-hitter in which he struck out 12 of the 16 batters he faced. Issuing no walks, Cummings' lone mistake was hitting a Pleasant Grove batter to start the fifth.

"Brandt has gotten better and better on the mound for us in every one of his most recent appearances. A lot of people don't realize, but he has had a no hitter going through at least 4 innings in his last three appearances on the mound," Smith said. "It has certainly caught our coaching staff's attention. He

is arguably one of our best velocity guys and has one of the better off speed pitches on our staff with his breaking ball. He's always had the talent. What's made him progress, in my opinion, is him learning 'how to pitch' and not just throw."

"He has done a really good job of getting ahead in the count against opposing hitters, and even when he is behind, he does a great job of working the count back to neutral or even in his favor. He has learned how to change speeds and keep hitters off balance," Smith added. "I feel like this year has been characterized by a lot of guys performing in different ways in big spots. Brandt has been a top performer at the plate for us this season and has gotten better each week defensively, and now he is piecing together his best outings on the mound at the most important time of the year."

Sweeping Pleasant Grove, the Golden Tigers advance to play Area 10 champ Leeds, who knocked out No. 8 Boaz in three games. Russellville will travel to Leeds for the series.

"Leeds is a really good program who beat a really good Boaz team, a top 10 team in 5A. In my opinion, Leeds is an extremely good baseball team, and an extremely underrated baseball team that I don't think has gotten the recognition they deserve," Smith said. "I know that they have several returning players with playoff experience, so we know they're going to be a challenge. Somehow we always seem to find our way to playing Leeds in the playoffs." "The task is tall, but with that being said, if you're not excited about it then your wood's probably a little wet. This is what you work for, for these kinds of opportunities," he added. Scouting Leeds to the extent possible, Smith said he and his staff have identified some of the challenges awaiting the Golden Tigers when they take on the Greenwave this weekend. "Leeds has two really good, tough lefties that we're going to see on the mound. Both are different and do different things well, so a lot of our week will be spent preparing our guys for what they'll see from them," Smith said. "They have five or more guys that can really hurt you at the plate and a good supporting cast around them, as well, so we'll be talking to our pitchers, going over scouting reports, trying to familiarize them with those guys and how we want to approach them."

"At this time of the year there's a lot of talk and time spent on scouting other teams and going to games and trying to learn as much as you can about your opponents, but, honestly, we're really trying to motivate and challenge our guys to execute our plan," he added. "If you can't execute then the scouting report isn't worth anything. Execution is just as important, if not more important, than preparing for whatever the other team is doing, so we're really challenging our

team and focusing on executing what we want to do." The Golden Tigers have a week's layoff before the series against the Green Wave begins. During the regular season the Golden Tigers rarely went more than two or three days without playing a game, so this week-long wait to play the next contest presents a change of pace in preparation.

"To combat not playing earlier in the week we scrimmage. We kind of split up Monday and Tuesday so they're shorter scrimmages and that way we can work on some specific things we

want to get done. But it also presents our guys with some live opportunities," Smith said. "Then we'll start dialing in on a scouting report and repping what you're going to see and creating an atmosphere at practice that will hopefully help our guys not to be overwhelmed at someone else's place." "You've got to be firing on all cylinders this time of year, so it's up to us coaches to have these guys ready to go. We're going to take ownership of that and I'm going to take ownership as the leader of this program to set the pace for that. Have no doubt, you know these guys are all in now," he added. This is Jess Smith's second postseason appearance as head coach of the Golden Tigers. One of the valuable lessons Smith said he learned from Russellville's postseason appearance last season is to try to prepare the team for a hostile road environment. While he said the coaching staff will do its best to ready the team for a rowdy opposing atmosphere, Smith hopes Golden Tiger fans will travel, wherever round two is played, in support of the team. Having friendly voices behind them, Smith said, goes a long way. "I know I'm asking a lot, but we'd love for their help on the road next week..." Smith said. "We would love to have the greatest fan base in the state behind us so that (the environment is) not such an overwhelming advantage for the home team."

"We really appreciate the fans showing up for us. It really means a lot," he added. "I'm thankful for them coming out on a Thursday night and staying out late with us, and we hope that we'll see them on the road with us next week."



# Homeward Bound: Belgreen to host baseball playoff series for first time in 34 years

Kadin Pounders  
Franklin Free Press

The Belgreen High School varsity baseball team advanced to the second round of the AHSAA playoffs over the weekend and, for the first time in decades, will have the privilege of hosting a postseason series.

Belgreen (14-12), the Class 1A Area 14 runner-up, traveled to Pell City on Friday and Saturday to take on Victory Christian School, the Area 9 champion, defeating the Lions two games to one to move on to the next round.

"For us to go into their place and win the first game, split (on Friday) and then come back the next day and win the series, it was big for our guys," Belgreen head coach Nathan Vincent said. "Even with our youth, all the youth that we have, our guys just competed. Everyone, one through nine in the lineup, was just competing."

Game one eventually belonged to the Bulldogs, but the contest needed nine innings to decide the winner. The game was scoreless through the first five innings, but Victory Christian went ahead 1-0 in the bottom of sixth. This left Belgreen with just three outs to work with in an attempt to tie the ballgame or go ahead—anything to extend the game. The Bulldogs came through in the clutch.

Landon Cox, Belgreen's leadoff hitter to start the seventh, reached on an error and was moved to third on the next at-bat thanks to a single by Ty Hamilton. A crucially laid bunt by Alex Guidry then scored Cox from third base to tie up the game 1-1.

"We were down 1-0 after the sixth and for us to come back and tie the ball game up—I think we had a squeeze bunt on the play to tie it up—I think that was big for us," Vincent said.

The Bulldogs were kept in the game due, in large part, to a stellar pitching performance from Will King. King tossed eight and one-third innings, allowing just two runs off five hits, and striking out seven batters.

"Will was phenomenal. He threw strikes and we made the plays behind him," Vincent said. "He did an excellent job. It was like last week when we went to Hackleburg and beat Hackleburg at their place. He went into (the Victory Christian) game like he did Hackleburg, with the attitude that no one was going to beat him that day."

Belgreen won it in the ninth with three runs in the top half of the inning. Back-to-back singles and a few free bases on errors led to King scoring the go-ahead run. Two plays later, another error scored Cox to make it 3-1 before Guidry, after stealing third base, was scratched across on a groundout, making it 4-1. The Lions pulled back a run in the bottom of the inning, but Guidry, coming in in relief, got a strikeout and a groundout to end the game before any more damage was done.

"Those three runs in the top of the inning were huge, and I think it shows the resiliency of this team," Vincent said. "Even though we're young, we can still compete anywhere in our lineup."

Victory Christian evened the series with a win in game two, beating Belgreen 10-6. The Lions scored in every inning, and the Bulldogs were held to just three hits while committing five errors. It just didn't go Belgreen's way in game two, but the defeat didn't deter the visitors, who came back for the decisive rubber match on Saturday confident they could come out on top.

The Bulldogs jumped on top of the Lions early, keeping Victory Christian off the board while scoring five runs through the first three innings. After pushing across a solo run in the second inning—an RBI double by Rush Berryman scored Konner Trapp—the Bulldogs put a four-spot in their following at-bat. Ashton's RBI single scored King to make it 2-0, and then an error after a bunt by Mitchell scored Ashton from third base. Guidry and Trapp scored the next two runs, making it 5-0, thanks to a wild pitch and a passed ball.

"I think we just played good, fundamental baseball," Vincent said. "We did several hit-and-runs, several bunts, a few squeezes. That's been our identity, small ball baseball, and we stuck to it."

Landon Cox got the start on the mound for the Bulldogs and tossed a complete game, seven innings. He allowed four runs, two earned, off nine hits and struck out four batters.

"We threw Landon Cox in game three and he threw a phenomenal seven innings in 94 pitches, I think," Vincent said. "A lot like (King in) game one, he threw strikes and we made the plays behind him, just playing fundamental baseball."

Cox's four runs allowed were given up in the fourth and fifth innings, cutting Belgreen's advantage to 5-4, but the guests were able to add two more insurance runs—solo runs scored by Cox and Guidry in the sixth and seventh innings made it 7-4—to close out the pivotal game three a little more comfortably.

"They were pumped up to win, for sure, and I think they were very excited," Vincent said of his team's postgame reaction.

By eliminating Victory Christian, the Bulldogs not only got the opportunity for another week of baseball but also ended one of their long postseason droughts.

"I think it's the first time since 1990, so 34 years since the last time Belgreen has hosted a playoff series," Vincent said. "I think that was in the back of (the players') heads. They wanted to host, they wanted to get people to come out to Belgreen to support them and show everyone what they're capable of."

Belgreen will have the luxury of home field advantage in round two, but the team coming into town will be no pushover. Appalachian, the top-ranked team in Class 1A according to the Alabama Sports Writers Association poll, will be vying to send the Bulldogs out of the tournament once again. A familiar postseason nemesis for Belgreen, Appalachian has ended Belgreen's season the last two years, so Vincent knows what his squad will be up against.

"They're the No. 1 team in 1A, so they're going to be good and they're well coached," Vincent said. "Our biggest thing is we're just going to have to make the plays, throw strikes, and just keep being who we are."

## VINA, From Page 11

Chandler won the javelin and triple jump, and earned second place in the shotput. Vina's Nevada Burney took home first in the high jump and Hester won the long jump. Harleigh Ridge placed second in the 1600 meter run for Vina.

"Overall, this was definitely a team effort and you can tell that by how we scored," Hester said. "We had 19 participate and all of them contributed in some form or fashion. I'm very proud of them and how much they've improved all season."

Phil Campbell had the top score in the 400 meter run. Red Bay High School was the top point total in the 200 meter run, 4x400 meter relay and javelin. And Belgreen outscored the other four schools in the 1600 meter run, 300 meter hurdles and the 800 meter run.

Vina will next compete in the 1A Sectionals, set for April 25-26 in Winfield. There are 13 schools set to compete in Winfield with each hoping to qualify for the state tournament.

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