

Star power

TIMES
DAILY

2023-24

ATHLETE
of the YEAR

Edwards,
Weathers
shine bright.



Seeing the sights



Miles Edwards had plenty of fun during his senior year of high school while starring in basketball and baseball. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Edwards made most of
experiencing Grand Canyon

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Miles Edwards looked at each of his knees and offered up a grin.

"I don't know how they made it," Edwards said with a laugh. "But they're good."

It had, after all, been a busy few days for Edwards and his joints while exploring the Grand Canyon. He figures he walked about 20 miles over a three-day stretch. And yet ... worth it.

"I thought it would be impressive, but it still blew my mind," Edwards said. "It was crazy."

So, what might have prompted a trip to one of the world's top natural attractions? Edwards has his friend, Max Bevis (a

very recent Shoals Christian graduate), to thank.

Bevis' parents were taking their son to Arizona as a graduation gift. Bevis asked if Edwards wanted to tag along.

It didn't require a lot of thinking on Edwards' part.

"I said, 'Absolutely,'" Edwards said.

The group flew from Nashville the morning of June 3 and returned the evening of June 7.

In between, as one might expect, there was plenty of sightseeing.

"Honestly, probably just being as high as you were and just the view," Edwards said of the neatest part of the Grand Canyon. "The view was insane. It's something you never see around here. It doesn't even look real standing out there, but it's amazing."



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Going for gold



Loretto's Ally Weathers hopes to juggle two gold state championship trophies with her volleyball and basketball as a senior. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Weathers wants more in her final Loretto season

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

There's a devilish look in Ally Weathers' eyes that give off a sense of foreboding.

The Loretto star, asked to compare what would be two potential high-lights for her, but would be two painful moments for someone facing her, doesn't need long to ponder.

Which would she prefer: Hammering a kill off an opponents' face (volleyball) or breaking someone's ankles with a cross-over dribble (basketball)?

Weathers grins with just a hint of evil

and mentally savors the possibilities.

"Probably spiking it off their face for me," said Weathers, the TimesDaily's girls athlete of the year. "It's a good feeling. You release a lot of anger getting to hit the ball."

Yes, Weathers said, there is some anger when she's playing volleyball, moreso than in basketball, though hoops is no surprise her No. 1 sport.

Volleyball is more of a place to get mean.

"Sometimes, sometimes. When I mess up, normally, if I hit one out or shank a ball, I just want to not shank the next one," Weathers said.

This year, Weathers and the Mustangs — puns intended — dotted a lot of

SEE WEATHERS, G5

WEATHERS

From Page G4

I's/eyes and crossed a lot of T's.

But they didn't end with the exclamation point the Mustangs wished.

Loretto was the state runner-up in both volleyball and basketball, a finish that makes her senior goals easier than choosing between a vicious kill or snappy crossover.

"To make it back to the state tournament, that's always our end goal," Weathers said. "This year, when we get there, we want to finish it and get the gold ball."

Volleyball may count as the most agonizing.

The Mustangs have reached the state tournament each of the last four seasons, finishing as the state runner-up three times, including the last two.

They did win a state title in 2018 when Ally was a mere sixth-grader watching her older sister star.

In basketball, this year marked Loretto's first state berth since 2021 when Ally was an eighth-grader watching her older sister star for a championship-winning team.

Ally, though she did win the affections

Girls athlete of the year

2024: Ally Weathers, Loretto
 2023: Chloe Siegel, Deshler
 2022: Karly Weathers, Loretto
 2021: Karly Weathers, Loretto
 2020: not named (pandemic)
 2019: Sara Puckett, Muscle Shoals
 2018: Taylor Aikerson, Deshler
 2017: Lilly Holmes, Florence
 2016: Erin Jewell, Brooks
 2015: Lauren Cantrell, Deshler
 2014: Cele Moon, Wilson
 2013: Ciarra Edwards, Wilson

of the family dog from her sister, of course wants to also win a state title of her own.

"For sure," Ally said. "We have a lot of good parts coming back, and we're looking to repeat, but we want to come back with the gold."

Ally and Karly, a two-time TimesDaily athlete of the year now playing basketball at Alabama, have settled any sisterly differences over Lizzie, the family dog.

When Karly left for college, Ally mounted an intense campaign to Lizzie. Karly has since signaled her surrender.

"We got the dog on my birthday, actually," Ally said. "I think I'm the dog's favorite. We didn't argue about it."

Girls athletic program of the year

2024: Loretto
 2023: Mars Hill
 2022: Brooks
 2021: Rogers
 2020: not named (pandemic)
 2019: Rogers
 2018: Deshler
 2017: Deshler
 2016: Wilson
 2015: Deshler

Ally admits Karly wins every one-on-one basketball showdown — "She's too good" — and she won't be facing her older brother in his sport, either.

Ryan, most notably the 2018 TimesDaily boys athlete of the year, is a pitcher for the Miami Marlins.

"I don't have a chance to touch it," Ally said before being asked about facing Ryan in a baseball offshoot.

"Wiffleball is a lot easier," she said, putting her estimated home-run distance off Ryan in that at "pretty far."

Ally does not play softball at Loretto and has no desire, either, for a very specific reason.

"I do not like outdoor sports at all,"



Ally Weathers, in basketball, averaged 20 points for Loretto this season and has scored 1,515 career points. In volleyball, she posted a .369 attack percentage and has 1,214 career kills. She helped the Mustangs finish as a state runner-up in both sports. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Ally said. "I played it when I was, I think, in sixth grade. I played it one year. Ryan and dad tried to get me to play it. I'm just like, 'No. I did not like it, and I'm not playing it.'

"Basketball and volleyball are my favorites."



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LARGE SCHOOL FOOTBALL

Something different

Phinizee swaps out gridiron for hardwood

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Cam Phinizee knows where his allegiance lies.

“Football,” the Russellville running back said. “By a mile.”

Makes sense, especially considering the season he just turned in.

Phinizee rushed for 2,389 yards, averaged 9 yards per carry and finished with a school-record 40 touchdowns. He became the Golden Tigers’ first sophomore to be named All-State. He was also a finalist for the Alabama Sports Writers Association’s Class 5A back of the year.

“It didn’t end where we wanted it to end,” said Phinizee, the TimesDaily’s large school football player of the year. “But I guess, for a sophomore season it went pretty well. ... I guess you could say all that hard work paid off.”

There appears to be some more on the way.

Phinizee mentioned wanting to find ways to get bigger, faster and stronger for his final two seasons of high school ball. There’s also the matter of what those numbers will look like next season. Might 2,500 yards be the goal? How about 50 touchdowns?

“I don’t know,” Phinizee said with a grin. “We’ll have to see where fate takes us.”

Those are some lofty numbers. Certainly something to think about. But in the meantime, Phinizee has something else to concentrate on, the cause of trading in his pads and cleats for a pair of shorts and sneakers.

In other words, basketball. It’s just something for Phinizee to do during the offseason, a different way to stay in shape and work on some different skill sets that might eventually find their way over to the football field.

And the idea? Well that came from Ben Phillips, an assistant football — and basketball — coach.

“They all think I’m pretty athletic,



Cam Phinizee has already picked up plenty of accolades on the football field, but spent time this winter testing out his basketball skills. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

so he just gave me a talk about being an athlete and that I need to play multiple sports,” Phinizee said. “It can help with recruiting and playing college ball.”

The transition was going OK, according to Phinizee. Although, he admitted he could use a little work on having a little more patience with his game. Consider it an overall work in progress.

But the key question: does he at least enjoy playing basketball?

“I like it,” Phinizee said with a laugh, “for the most part.”

He knows where his loyalties lie. As of December, there were only eight more months until football season kicks off.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Cam Phinizee was no stranger to finding the end zone this past season.



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Closing an era

Mars Hill collected plenty of wins with Hanson family

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Griffin Hanson had already gotten his picture taken and his interview done.

But as the Mars Hill quarterback headed out the door of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, the senior revealed why he had always opted to wear No. 6.

"It was the number my dad and brother wore," said Hanson, his white jersey showing the wear and tear of plenty of football.

Perhaps next season, someone else on the Panthers' roster will opt to wear it. Perhaps not. Either way, it will represent quite a bit of change for Mars Hill and coach Darrell Higgins.

By the time training camp comes around, it'll be the first time since the 2015 season ended the Panthers won't have a Hanson on the field or behind center.

"At the start of my eighth-grade year, we had a senior that was a quarterback for a couple games until we made the switch," said Hanson, the TimesDaily's small school football player of the year. "So there was a tiny gap, but not a lot."

Joseph Hanson was a three-year starter at quarterback and defensive back. He helped lead Mars Hill to the school's first football title in 2018 — a 53-26 win over Linden for the Class 1A championship. Joseph was also named All-State at defensive back.

The younger Hanson didn't take long to make an impression.

The Panthers returned to the Class 1A title game in 2019. They won the 2A championship the year after thanks to a 56-14 drubbing of Abbeville. Hanson finished with a 51-9 career record. He accounted for 117 total touchdowns.

This season, Hanson finished with 2,011 total yards and 31 scores. He accumulated 42 tackles and two sacks as a defensive back. He was named second-team All-State as an athlete.

"Definitely winning the 2A state championship my freshman year," Hanson



Last fall capped Griffin Hanson's five-year run as Mars Hill's starting quarterback, the eighth straight for a Hanson overall. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

said of his favorite football memory. "But also beating Russellville at home this season. I think that was a really good win for us."

Mars Hill beat the Golden Tigers 27-24 after Hanson threw for a pair of fourth-quarter touchdowns. The first an 18-yarder to Isaiah Owens, the second went for 48 yards to Tanner Caudle.

Overall, some impressive stats.

But might Griffin care to comment on

who might be the better football player in the family?

"Obviously, you'd probably say yourself, but he'd probably say himself, too," the younger Hanson said with a small grin. "But seeing him win, I've always looked up to him and wanted to learn from him. He was a great mentor for me."

Griffin Hanson's did plenty of winning as well. It'll just be a little different

without the usual No. 6 leading the huddle.

"It's going to be pretty weird, but it's going to be fun keeping up with this team," Hanson said. "You're going to get to see these younger guys go out and compete, and what they can do."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

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LARGE SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

Double-A for effort

For Addison Armstrong, season was an A-plus

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Oh, yes, Addison Armstrong exclaims, there's a new order of things at Muscle Shoals.

Like the old "Mean Girls" movie — and, it's assumed, the upcoming remake — there has been a change in the pecking order around and down the halls.

Maybe the football players remain unaware, Armstrong says, but those Trojans have been dethroned.

"They think they are the top dogs, but they don't know yet," said Armstrong, the TimesDaily's large school volleyball player of the year.

"We're going to put them on their level."

The revolution will not be televised. Or should that be "was not" televised?

"We're going to kill y'all, and we're going to get way more wins than you are," Armstrong said and — for those devoid of a sense of humor — she was both joking and using the volleyball term "kill."

"We're going to win all our games and go undefeated."

The volleyball Trojans did notch 32 victories this year, a mere 21 more than the lowly football Trojans.

That sound you hear may be a football player grousing: "But they play more than we do."

"Excuses," Armstrong answers.

Yes, there is a jovial relationship between the two programs. It's called banter for those unfamiliar with the concept.

"We're friendly, but there is a little bit of competition," Armstrong said.

This season, football lineman Ellis Underwood did say that Muscle Shoals was a volleyball school. Of course, it was a volleyball off week and volleyball was in the Class 6A North Regional.

Underwood also admitted Armstrong would put a hurtin' on him if they were matched up across the volleyball net.



Addison Armstrong, between volleyball and softball, may not have time to try the guitar, though maybe she'll revisit the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.
[DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Take solace, Mr. Underwood, Armstrong said she would not have you as her No. 1 target.

"Probably Jamir Goodloe," Armstrong said. "He's a funny guy, and I don't think he would take it seriously if I knocked him on the head with a volleyball."

"I'd probably leave a knot on the top of his head."

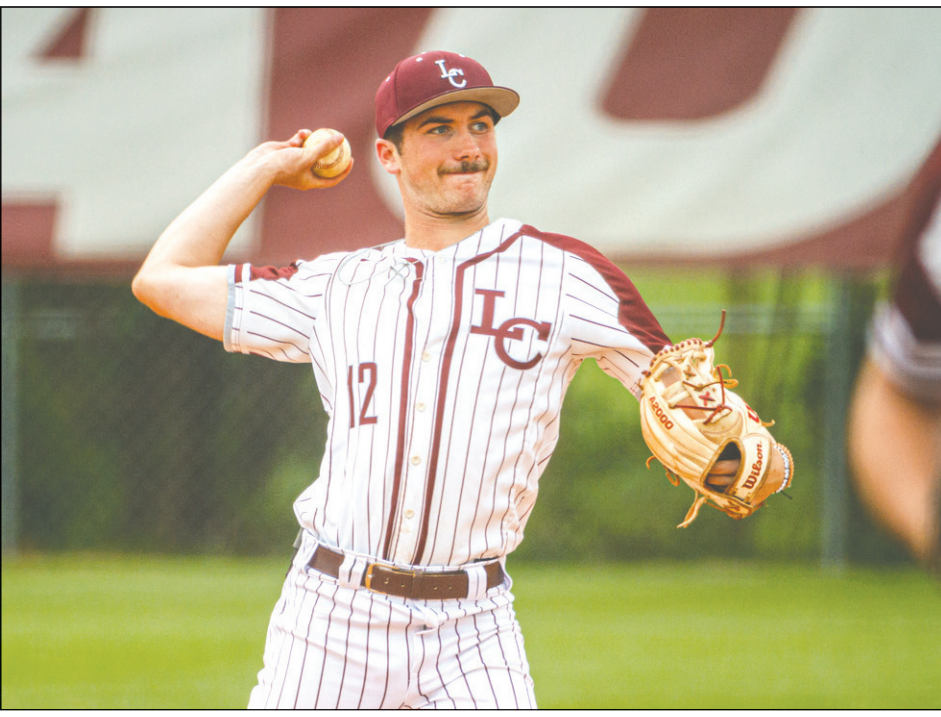
Such a talent, and Armstrong's

all-around abilities, is what drew area coaches' attention to her. She led Muscle Shoals with 231 kills and helped the Trojans win their first area championship in four seasons.

"We have grown so much in volleyball so far," Armstrong said. "Compared to past years, I think this year was a knock out of the park. It was amazing."

Armstrong, in December, was already thinking about softball season (she's a second baseman) with her senior volleyball season due next fall. She wants to build on this year.

"I felt like we succeeded in everything we did," Armstrong said. "My goal is to be a leader and to succeed in everything I do in volleyball and in softball and in school."



Miles Edwards enjoyed a nice vacation after being named the Class 3A baseball player of the year once again. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

EDWARDS

From Page G2

Not a bad start-of-the-summer trip for the TimesDaily's boys athlete of the year after standing out both on the basketball court and baseball field.

During the winter season, Edwards averaged a little more than 17 points with six games of 25 points or more, including a season-high 31 for Lauderdale County. He also averaged 7.7 rebounds and three assists. Edwards was voted second-team All-State in Class 3A by the Alabama Sports Writers Association.

In baseball, Edwards irritated opponents with both his arm and bat.

Edwards went 6-1 with a 1.60 ERA and a .142 average against from the mound. He struck out 78 and walked 29 in 57 innings.

At the plate, Edwards hit .486, slugged .651 and had a .541 on-base percentage. He drove in 30 runs and scored 30 times in 31 games.

Edwards was named the Class 3A player of the year for the second straight season. He'll be playing college baseball at Wallace State-Hanceville.

Now, there is just the matter of where Edwards, a fan of national parks, might think of going next.

A jacket might be needed for that one. "There's an Alaskan cruise that goes to Glacier Bay National Park," Edwards said. "That would be pretty cool to go and see."

"The only thing is that it's cold and I'm not a fan of the cold. I'd still go, though."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Miles Edwards averaged a little more than 17 points in basketball and was named second-team All-State.

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Boys athlete of the year

- 2024: Miles Edwards, Lauderdale Co.
- 2023: Miles Edwards, Lauderdale Co.
- 2022: Kyler Murks, Brooks
- 2021: Kyler Murks, Brooks
- 2020: not named (pandemic)
- 2019: Colt Smith, Mars Hill
- 2018: Ryan Weathers, Loretto
- 2017: Malik Smith, Sheffield
- 2016: Brax Garrett, Florence
- 2015: Keaton Anderson, Florence
- 2014: Kendrick Doss, Florence
- 2013: Thomas Burrows, Mars Hill

Boys athletic program of the year

- 2024: Mars Hill
- 2023: Deshler
- 2022: Mars Hill
- 2021: Russellville
- 2020: not named (pandemic)
- 2019: Mars Hill
- 2018: Lauderdale Co.
- 2017: Muscle Shoals
- 2016: Russellville
- 2015: Russellville

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SMALL SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL

Kill switch

Howard helped power Lexington back to state berth

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Alex Howard stares ahead, the adoration in her voice obvious.

Lexington may have met one goal this year by simply making the state tournament.

Next season's goal won't be so pedestrian.

"We're going to win a state championship," said Howard, the TimesDaily's small school volleyball player of the year.

"We got to state this year, but next year we have to get further.

"Just getting to state is not the end. We're going to end with a win and not a loss."

It's a better line than Howard casts at the lake, she admits.

After killing her way through the volleyball season, the junior moved on to basketball. Her springs, once filled with softball and track and field, are now focused merely on travel volleyball.

But, in between, there's another activity she admits she enjoys.

"I fish, sometimes, whenever it's warm," Howard said, quickly mentioning that no fish has been harmed in any attempt.

"I have not caught a fish. I usually catch myself," she said. "I hook myself all the time, but I try."

Howard, who finished with 475 kills this season, sending volleyballs either to the floor or off opposing players, regularly has issues getting her bait and hook to the fishes.

Don't look for her to catch dinner.

"This summer, we were at the lake, and I hooked myself," Howard said. "It started bleeding, but it wasn't too bad. I hooked my hand.



Lexington's Alex Howard helped the Golden Bears play a state tournament tune this season and found herself at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.

[PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"Maybe I'm not a fisher."

The follow-up question was obvious. Almost as obvious as the answer.

Is Howard better at volleyball than fishing?

"Yes, yes, yes," Howard says.

Howard helped lead Lexington to a 43-18 season and to end the Golden Bears' state tournament drought. While Lexington reached the state quarterfinals for the 22nd time in 27 years, this year's berth was the first since 2019.

Such lengthy absences, she said, are unacceptable at Lexington.

"We have a lot of weight on our shoulders because of our volleyball history, but I think it motivates us more," Howard said. "It's like we have to get there. It's our job."

Lexington, she said, is one of those rare schools where volleyball is No. 1.

"It's definitely a volleyball school," Howard said. "You don't see football banners up there. You see volleyball banners."

She does enjoy watching her football team and, maybe, even her little brother, too. Sawyer was a freshman this season who will play more in coming years, Alex said.

Sawyer also plays basketball. Their on-court sibling duels aren't what they used to be.

"We don't really play one-on-one anymore," Alex said. "It usually ends in a fight."

Does she beat him that badly?

"Yep."



Lexington's Alex Howard averaged 7.8 kills per match this season.



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GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

Runs in the family

Like her dad, Trimble set to compete at UNA

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Mary Anna Trimble grew up in a cross country household.

But that doesn't mean the now-senior at Muscle Shoals was always enthralled with running.

"My dad ran cross country at UNA when he was in college and graduated from Muscle Shoals, too," Trimble said. "He actually coached at UNA for a couple years for cross country and track. But I would go to meets with him when I was little. I just wasn't interested in running at first.

"And then one day, someone asked me to join the (Muscle Shoals Middle School) team in seventh grade and I thought, 'I'll give it a shot.' I just fell in love with it and ever since then, I've just been running".

Continuing a little bit of the family business, then.

Scott Trimble, Mary Anna's father, was a former All-Gulf South Conference runner for the Lions in the late 1980s. He still holds the 12th-fastest 10K time in program history. He later returned to take over the cross country and women's track and field program in 2003 before stepping down in spring of 2017.

Soon, the younger Trimble will get to see how she stacks up. She's set to run for UNA this fall.

"I'm excited for it," said Trimble, the TimesDaily's All-Area girls cross country runner of the year for the second straight season. "I'm excited for the teammates I'm going to have, there'll be some local runners joining me there, too. But I'm also excited to get the chance to keep PRing and keep running for the next four years."

She didn't do too bad in her final year at Muscle Shoals, either.

Trimble had eight top-10 finishes, including a third-place finish at sectionals with an injured hamstring. She set a PR at the Jesse Owens Invitational with a 19:15.

"I would like to break 19 (minutes) going into college," Trimble said. "And



Mary Anna Trimble will have run for the same schools as her dad did back in the day. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

I would really like to get into the low 18s by the end of my freshman year, if not break it, and go from there."

Call in quite the change from Trimble's early introduction into the sport.

And as for the important question — Who is faster? Her dad or her? — Trimble knew there was only one right answer.

"I would say I am," Trimble said with a laugh. "He probably would too now."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY



Harper Branscome got to hear some celebratory tunes after coming back from injury to help Muscle Shoals qualify for the state meet. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Bi-cycle, bi-cycle

Branscome had to utilize different training method

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Harper Branscome doesn't need long to make a decision.

Given the option of picking which is harder — running or biking — the Muscle Shoals senior made his feeling rather clear.

"Definitely running," said Branscome, the TimesDaily's All-Area boys cross country runner of the year.

He does, after all, have some experience with both. Although that was more out of a necessity than a want.

Branscome developed a stress reaction — the beginning of a stress fracture — in his foot at the start of the season, the result of him having "overdone it running." The injury cost him about half of the Trojans' meets.

"It was very tough," Branscome said. "Didn't know how I was going to bounce back from everything."

Still, there was the hope that he could return at some point. And that meant Branscome needed to stay in shape. So, along with icing his foot and not running on it, he opted for a regiment that allowed him to not only work out, but heal as quickly as possible.

Swimming was something Branscome

took to. Rowing was as well. He did those every couple of days. And, of course, there was getting on a bike.

"Every Sunday, I'd go out and bike like 25 miles in the morning," Branscome said. "I went with my youth minister. We'd go around the city or wherever we wanted to go."

That's one way to work in some cardio. But was it enjoyable?

"I did (enjoy it)," Branscome said. "But I did get tired after a little bit. Sitting on a bike for that long isn't fun."

It seemed to pay off.

When Branscome returned to cross country, he placed second at the Northwest Alabama championships, won the Colbert County title, finished third in the Class 6A, Section 6 meet and set a PR with a 16:17 at the state meet. His time was the lowest among Shoals-area runners.

The Muscle Shoals boys also qualified for state as a team for the first time since 2015.

"It was great to know that I bounced back well," said Branscome, who is set to run at Wallace State-Hanceville this fall. "I just tried improving every day and I was able to do that. Plus, I didn't know if I'd PR this season, so I was pretty happy."

Sorry, biking. Running it is.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

SMALL SCHOOL
BOYS BASKETBALL

Special K

Kellogg serving up more than just on basketball court

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Trey Kellogg considers himself a basketball player.

The accolades certainly back that up.

The Covenant Christian senior is a two-time first-team Class 1A All-State selection by the Alabama Sports Writers Association. He was a finalist for the 1A player of the year last season and is a finalist for the award once again. There's also the 2023 state championship with another title game appearance.

But that doesn't mean TimesDaily's small school boys player of the year — for the second straight season — isn't afraid to branch out and try something new.

Last year? Baseball was the sport that filled some of Kellogg's time during the spring with the Eagles reaching the second round of the playoffs.

And this year? Well, it was time to give something else a go.

He's traded in his glove and bat for a racquet. His cleats for another pair of sneakers.

"I was supposed to play tennis last year and I told them I was gonna play, but I backed out at the last second to play baseball," Kellogg said with a grin. "So, this year, I had to play."

Of course, that doesn't mean there wasn't a little good-natured persuading involved. Call it a half-court press from Covenant Christian coach Morgan Bishop (with some of Kellogg's peers deploying the set to relative perfection).

"I was at work and somebody sent me a Snap and it was of her," Kellogg said. "She was telling me I need to play tennis. That's how it started and so I told her I was gonna play."

So, what might be the best part of Kellogg's game? A fair question.

Perhaps his serve or maybe his backhand? How about the forehand or the volleys?

"Just playing at the net, really," Kellogg said. "That's my favorite thing to



Covenant Christian's Trey Kellogg is a standout in basketball, but that doesn't mean he won't try his hand at other sports, too. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

do, rush the net."

Sounds like an intimidating prospect for an opponent to watch the 6-foot-4 Kellogg run up on them that quickly.

"Yeah," Kellogg said. "It can be a little bit."

Perhaps tennis, after all, might be the sport he considers to be his best going forward. That is the whole point of trying something new.

"I'm not quite there yet," Kellogg said with a laugh. "Basketball is still the one I'm the best at, but I enjoy tennis a lot. I wish I did try it sooner."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Trey Kellogg is a two-time Class 1A first-team All-State selection and a two-time 1A player of the year finalist.

SMALL SCHOOL
GIRLS BASKETBALL

Record aim

To Baugus, state title bigger goal than school mark

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

The potential is there for shenanigans.

Blair Baugus, a Wayne County junior and two-time TimesDaily small school player of the year, is a relative pittance of points from becoming the school's all-time leading scorer.

It shouldn't take too long — hopefully not terribly long — next winter for her to knock off the record holder from her longtime perch.

Except the current champ is the champ-in-waiting's current coach.

Might Molly Ashley seek a way of still ensuring the Wildcats' success while suppressing Baugus' threat?

"She wouldn't do that. No, she would not do that," Baugus said. "She would love for me to break it. She would."

"If anybody is going to, she would want me to."

Baugus stands at 1,812 career points after three years — and 102 wins — for Wayne County.

Molly Ashley (nee York) graduated in 2001 with 2,227 points.

Just 415 more Baugus points and Ashley, whose background is also as a history teacher, will see her record become history.

"I'm trying to get more than that," Baugus said.

Ending a season with a victory would be the No. 1 goal.

That would mean a state championship, a goal that has both teased and eluded the Wildcats over the last three years.

They were state runners-up each of the last two years. This season, Wayne County lost in the semifinals.

"We had the option to go to the championship game the next day, but we all obviously decided not," Baugus said. "We didn't want to see that. It's definitely a goal to get back there next year."

"We're going to have to work hard, take every practice seriously and get ready."

Had they gone, they would have watched the team that beat



Wayne County's Blair Baugus, a two-time TimesDaily player of the year, says her primary goal next year is for the Wildcats to finally win a state championship. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

them — Pickett County — win a state championship.

"We felt like the semifinals this year were the finals," Baugus said. "We felt whatever team won that was going to win the state championship."

"We basically thought of it as the championship game."

In the meantime, Baugus has started her usual spring non-basketball habit, aka softball, while also jumping into AAU hoops.

Her summer AAU travel slate includes Texas, Virginia, Louisville, etc. In between, she's at the pool. ("I like to tan. I like to get really tan.")

She also had basketball recruiting to finalize and a decision to make.

"It's exhausting sometimes, but it's really chilled out, and I'm sure it will heat up again with AAU," said Baugus, who announced in late April that she had committed to Middle Tennessee. "I'm going to have to make a decision soon. Probably this summer, so it's winding down."



Wayne County is 102-10 in Blair Baugus' three seasons. [HEATHER WARREN/FOR THE TIMESDAILY]

LARGE SCHOOL
GIRLS BASKETBALL

Charging ahead

Muscle Shoals' Brown raring to play at UAH

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Tamora Brown's college goals are obvious.

Play well for UAH. Graduate from UAH with a degree in aerospace engineering. Continue to be a quality teammate like she has been at Muscle Shoals.

And, of course, take down her older sister's records.

Brown, the TimesDaily's large school player of the year, is following in her sister's footsteps when she plays for the Chargers.

"She was really good, and she set a lot of records at UAH," Brown said. "I'm going there to beat them."

Jasmine Hammon — now Jasmine Johnson — has left Brown a lofty number for which to shoot.

Hammon remains UAH's all-time leading scorer from a career that lasted 2010-14. Brown needs just 2,103 points to tie and 2,104 points to beat her.

Hammon is also the school's all-time leading rebounder. It may be safe to say Brown, a 5-6 guard, won't threaten that.

Her older sister, Brown says, supports her attempt.

"She encouraged me to go there as well," Brown said. "She would support me wherever I go."

Johnson, with 14 more years of life experience, and Brown haven't had any personal duels recently, Brown said.

The outcome — according to Brown — would be predictable. What little brother or sister wouldn't be so brazen.

"I'd kill her one-on-one," Brown said in sisterly banter. "We haven't played since like three years ago. It's time for a rematch."

"She doesn't want any. She doesn't want these problems."

Through the spring, Brown was finishing her senior year at Muscle Shoals and earning some extra money selling shoes at a sporting goods store.



Tamora Brown doesn't want to sit idly by when it comes to breaking her sister's records at UAH. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Her secret selling strategy?

"You have to wear them right. You just have to wear them right," Brown said. "I just give them my opinion. I tell them I think these look good on their feet. They trust me because I have shoes that look good on my feet."

"They see you wearing good shoes and they'll trust you."

This season, Brown averaged 17.7 points, was third-team Class 6A All-State and helped lead Muscle Shoals to an 18-7 season. She finished with 1,201 career points.

Next year, without Brown, the Trojans will still find success, she said.

Hello, Makenzie Sears and Abby Pitman.

"I expect big things out of both of them. ... They'll do well," said Brown, who touts Makenzie as the soon-to-be No. 1 player in the Sears family.

Makenzie's older brother — Alabama All-American, Final Four, NBA potential and whatnot — has been warned.

"She will be the best," Brown said. "You have Mark, and he's pretty good right now. That's a dog out there. But Makenzie will get there."



Tamora Brown helped lead Muscle Shoals to a second straight Northwest Regional and fourth in six years.

LARGE SCHOOL
BOYS BASKETBALL

King me

Golden Tigers' standout eager to hit some more goals

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

EJ King admitted he wasn't initially aware the announcement had come out.

The Russellville standout was getting in his required amount of sleep when the Alabama Sports Writers Association's All-State basketball teams were revealed March 16.

No worries. Mom had the Times-Daily's large school player of the year covered.

"My mom had woken me up and she told me. I really didn't know what she was saying, though," King said with a laugh. "I just went back to sleep. Then I got up and she told me again. That's when I realized that I made first-team, so I was pretty excited, still am."

Understandable and fairly easy to see why.

After all, King was the first Russellville boys player in 41 years to receive first-team recognition. Luther Tiggs was the last. That was in 1983, well before King's birth year.

Of course, averaging 25 points per game doesn't hurt those chances. King had five games where he scored 30 or more points, including a pair of 35-point performances that came against Marion County and Lawrence County (Alabama).

King also finished with a boys Shoals-area high (regardless of classification) of 17 games with 20-plus points.

So who might have been more excited? Mom or EJ?

"She was very excited," King said. "I just started smiling and went back to sleep."

Perhaps to dreams of what else might be crossed off his bucket list — from an individual standpoint.

Among them are finally being able to show off some of his hops above the rim in a game. A successful Eastbay dunk remains the prime candidate if he had



EJ King earned some long-awaited recognition for the Russellville boys basketball team. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

the choice.

"I've wind-milled before, just not in a game," said King, who is listed at 6-foot-1. "I've got that on video. It was one day we were in the gym."

Best be on the lookout then.

King will get some extra practice sessions in, too, thanks to some summer AAU events. And then it will be back to preparing for some Russellville basketball.

"That's coming soon," King said with a grin. "Senior year."

Perhaps another All-State selection as well.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



EJ King led the Shoals with 17 games of 20 or more points.

Steady climb

Deshler's Mills caps final season with best effort

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Ross Mills has his favorite wrestling moves.

There's the technique known as the Kelly Roll that puts an opponent on their shoulder. The single leg, too.

But it's really what's at the sport's core that drew the Deshler senior to the mat. (And has it ranked above football in his personal preference.)

"Slamming people," said a grinning Mills, the TimesDaily's wrestler of the year. "Picking them up and being physical with them."

Well, that and a little bit of family experience.

"My brother, Ryan, wrestled," Mills said. "He's just two years older. But I wanted to give it a shot and be like him."

So, Ross decided to give wrestling a try in the sixth grade — at 12 years old — and slowly began to progress from there.

He qualified for his first state tournament as a sophomore, finishing fourth in Class 1A-4A's 152-pound bracket. A year later, Mills took fourth at 170 pounds.

And in his final season?

Mills placed second at 190 pounds. He beat Corner's Spencer Unruh in overtime and pinned Christopher Weaver from the Alabama School for the Blind before losing by decision to Ashville's Brady Thrash. That was after winning the 1A-4A North Sectional thanks to four victories, the last of which came over — coincidentally — Thrash via decision.

In the end, Mills was Deshler's 10th state finalist in the last 12 seasons, which have resulted in five state champions and five runners-up.

"I just listened to my coach and did everything he taught me to do," Mills said. "And kept my mind on trying to win every match. But I didn't know I would end up going that far. You just never know."

Seems like a solid strategy. Simply, but effective.

Overall, Mills finished with a 47-4



Deshler's Ross Mills capped off his final season of high school wrestling with a second-place finish in the 190-pound bracket of the Class 1A-4A state tournament. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

record, according to the AHSAA. He had top-four finishes in five other tournaments, too.

Not a bad way to cap off a high school career, either.

"I enjoyed it a lot and made a lot of

memories with a lot of friends," Mills said. "It was one of the best experiences of my life."

Sounds like Mills was glad he decided to give the sport a try those years ago.

"Yes," Mills said. "Absolutely, without question."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

GIRLS TENNIS



Annabelle Ford will soon be attending college at Cornell, which is located in New York state. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Winter is coming

After standout season, Ford ready to head north

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Annabelle Ford knows changes will soon be coming.

Winters in New York, after all, can get pretty cold. Snow will also likely be more of a common occurrence than it has been in Alabama.

“I’m going to have to overhaul my whole wardrobe,” Ford said with a laugh. “I only have one coat. That’s it. I’m going to have to get some warm clothing.”

So, why such renovation?
Ford will be spending quite a bit of time in Upstate New York.

The TimesDaily’s girls tennis player of the year is attending college at Cornell — an Ivy League school — in Ithaca to study psychology. (Cornell listed its acceptance rate at a little more than 8% for its incoming class.)

The school is about 50 miles from Syracuse, 150 from Buffalo and 220 from the Big Apple. It’s also just under 1,000 miles from Muscle Shoals by way of Louisville, Cincinnati and Cleveland.

“I know it is,” Ford said when told her future school is a little far from home. “I’m excited and nervous. It’s gonna be a little hard because I’m going to be starting from the bottom and have to meet

all these new people. Cornell has a lot of international students.

“But that will also be fun.”
That might also be a good way to describe Ford’s senior season.

Ford went 22-4 in No. 1 singles for the Trojans, reaching the quarterfinals of the Class 6A state tournament. Her losses were to the No. 1 players from Madison Academy and Decatur — twice each.

“It was just how flexible my playstyle is,” Ford said. “Some players get stuck on one part of their game — their forehand or their serve or just hitting the ball as hard as they can. I don’t really have a strategy I apply against everyone, I kind of wait and see how my opponent plays and play to their weaknesses.”

When not hitting the books at Cornell, Ford said she might try her hand at club tennis. She also isn’t opposed to getting the chance to see some of the Northeast like New York City, Boston or Philadelphia.

Perhaps some skiing could be in her future. If not, there’s always snowboarding, right? The area would seem right for such activities. The weather would seem right, too.

“I like snow, but I like looking at it more than being in it,” Ford said. “But I might give it a try.”

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

BOYS TENNIS

Looking up

Early pro tournaments ‘motivated’ Minshew

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Everette Minshew knows he has the photo somewhere on his phone.

The one featuring a much younger — and shorter — version of himself and his favorite tennis player.

It’s just a matter of being able to scroll back far enough through all the pictures he has saved.

“I don’t think a lot of people know (who my favorite player is), but it’s Karen Khachanov,” Minshew said as he continued to look, his thumb moving at a decent pace. “He’s like top 20 in the world.”

“I went to a pro tournament up in Cincinnati a couple of times. I saw him warming up and I watched the whole warmup. He was about to go out the other side of the gate and I guess he noticed I had been watching, and he changed directions and gave me an autograph. That was pretty cool.”

Minshew, now 16, isn’t exactly sure how old he was when he met Khachanov, but the back-to-back TimesDaily’s boys tennis player of the year does have his facts straight on the pro.

Khachanov is ranked 18th in the world. He’s won six tournaments, including an ATP Tour finals in 2018, a silver medal in men’s singles at the Tokyo Olympics and helped Russia win the Davis Cup in 2021.

Not too shabby.
Minshew’s sophomore season wasn’t too bad, either.

The Deshler standout racked up plenty of wins and a medal of his own along the way.

Minshew went 22-1 in No. 1 singles, his only loss to the top player at Madison Central, Mississippi’s top team. He also went 22-2 in doubles.

Oh, there was the Class 4A-5A state championship Minshew won by beating Jasper’s William Johnson 7-5, 6-1. It was the first individual title in Deshler history.

“I wasn’t expecting it,” Minshew



Everette Minshew became the first Deshler player to win an individual state title this spring. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

said. “But I felt like I could have. I knew all of my competition there and what it would take. I felt like I had a good shot, even if some people didn’t see me as a favorite.”

And then, Minshew stops scrolling. He’s found the photo he had been looking for. The one with a 6-foot-6 Khachanov slightly towering over a young kid in a white T-shirt and backwards hat.

“I would say going to those pro tournaments really motivated me,” said Minshew, who has attending Wimbledon as an item on his bucket list. “Afterwards, it just makes you want to get better.”

And perhaps line up another championship of his own.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

Gold rush

Armstead feels buzz after making Hatton history

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Eva Armstead enjoyed the spoils of a little history.

Winning the first gold medal in Hatton outdoor track and field history — and winning the second and third, too — put her in a little spotlight.

She didn't haul out her medals for the first day of school that followed, but Armstead did don a state champion T-shirt for the occasion.

"Some people were like, 'Y'all watch out, here's a state champ. She's coming through,'" said Armstead, the Times-Daily's two-time girls track and field athlete of the year.

"Somebody said, 'Big dog in the house,'" Armstead said. "They were joking around with me, and it was an honor."

Armstead's gold-laden haul, with one dose of silver, led to more rewards.

To the victor goes some pizza stains, too.

Her chemistry teacher, Chasta Chamness, had promised some pepperoni and sausage and cheese goodness. Chamness, who is also Hatton's athletic director, didn't welch on the deal.

"We got a bunch of pizzas and ate them all," said Armstead, who followed her training slip with extra work.

"We went and ran it all off that day," she said. "We had summer track practice."

Armstead won Class 2A championships in the 200, 400 and long jump. The sophomore was second in the 100 by seven-hundredths of a second, and those seven-hundredths will drive her for the next year.

"The gold medals are really nice," Armstead said. "The silver medal was not supposed to happen. I tripped up in the 100, so that was pretty devastating. Overall, it was good, though."

Still, a not-bad haul considering Armstead was dealing with ankle injuries.

Between volleyball and basketball and track, she hurt her ankles three times this year (twice the right ankle, once the left).



Hatton's Eva Armstead hopes to follow her three Class 2A gold medals this year with some 4A championships in 2025. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Armstead never went to a doctor, fearful of what the diagnosis might be.

"It's still healing on its own," she said. "They kind of hurt on the long jump, but it was bearable. It wasn't too bad."

But there is one thing for certain for Armstead in 2025.

She won't win any Class 2A events, nor climb any medal stage in Cullman.

Guaranteed.

Hatton will be in 4A next year, which means the Hornets' state meet venue will be in Gulf Shores.

"We'll be going to the beach instead of Cullman," Armstead said. "There's going to be more competition. I've seen the times, and if they're not right there with me, they're above me."

"I'm going to have to get faster."

However, nothing can take away 2024 or her place in Hatton history.

"It's pretty cool to know that my name is going to be known probably for forever at Hatton," Armstead said. "To me, it's an honor to be the first. I didn't know about it until someone said something, but it's pretty cool."

BOYS TRACK & FIELD

Fluid situation

Greene motivated after hospital kept him from state

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Jaquess Greene, with thoughts of challenging for a state long jump championship, found himself in a bad position this spring.

Just in time for his Class 6A sectional, the one where he needed to shine to simply qualify for the championship meet, Greene suddenly had no chance. He was in the hospital.

Dehydration derailed the Muscle Shoals junior's hunt for a gold medal, gave him a small vacation at the wrong time and left him with a burning desire for 2025.

"I was pretty sick about it," said Greene, the TimesDaily's boys track and field athlete of the year. "I was a little bit mad because I was going to go for another ring."

Greene had won the 6A championship in the long jump at the indoor meet over the winter, so it was natural for him to year for some outdoor glory in Gulf Shores.

But his feet never even touched the beach, his eyes never stared at the sea. When he barely made it off his couch, he was headed for an emergency room.

"I was laying down, and I started throwing up, so I went to the hospital," Greene said. "I couldn't hold anything in my stomach. It was bad."

Greene, who was among the best in the Shoals in four individual events and anchored Muscle Shoals' 400 relay, said he has fully recovered.

Doctors told him that his dehydration was something that can happen, and that he needs to take measures to ward it off in the future.

"I guess my body couldn't take all of it," he said of his training. "I was in the hospital for a couple of days. They had to get some fluids in me."

Greene has since taken steps to get the fluids himself. Water is a regular



Muscle Shoals junior Jaquess Greene may be standing tall now, but he was hospitalized for dehydration this season, which ended his hopes for a Class 6A gold medal. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

companion, along with fruit. His preference is an apple.

There are also thoughts of what he missed this year.

"I have to come back and prove myself," Greene said. "I have to come back and claim my spot next year."

First, Greene will take another swing at football, where he's a stand-out running back. (Asked who was meaner between football coach Scott Basden and track coach Catrina Smith, Greene was succinct: "Him, for sure.")

Maybe, Greene said, a football state championship will foreshadow some track gold.

"We want to go all the way," Greene said. "I think we're going to be pretty good, but we have some things to work on."

GIRLS GOLF

Tinkering around

Annalee Regan still in search of right putter

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

MUSCLE SHOALS — Annalee Regan has something of a love/hate relationship when it comes to her putting.

On one hand, it's what she loves to practice more than anything in golf.

It's also what she considers a weakness in her already formidable and getting even better golf game.

"I love going out and putting and chipping all the time," the three-time TimesDaily girls golfer of the year said. "I say that, but that's probably the worst part of my game. Probably because I do it so much, I overthink it. I can't just go out there and do it freely. I am thinking about a million things at once."

Regan's sophomore season with Muscle Shoals certainly didn't reflect any type of a poor performance on the greens. She finished fourth in the Class 6A championships, shot under par six times, including a pair of 4-under 68s, and had eight more rounds at par or 1 over.

In search of perfection, she keeps tinkering, trying to find the magic formula that leads to her getting the ball in the hole more frequently.

She changed her grip and putter two weeks into the season and then went back to a former putter just a few weeks before the state tournament. It's all in an effort to find an edge on the greens.

"I went left-hand low with a completely different length and shaft two weeks into the season," she said. "Then, about three weeks before state, I changed back to a putter I had in the eighth grade. I have had three or four putters within the last three or four months."

Her arsenal of putters includes two blade-style putters and "three or four" mallet-style putters. Regan admits it might be a little much.

"It seems like every time I am on the putting green I have a different putter," she said. "I need to find one and stick with it."



Muscle Shoals' Annalee Regan, the three-time TimesDaily player of the year, says she is still seeking ways to improve. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Regan fell in love with golf when she entered the seventh grade. The game's challenge is what she enjoys most.

"There's always something you can get better at," she said. "Like, I can always improve some aspect of my game. Whether it is hitting one or two more fairways and then dropping a few more putts. Or get my approach shots closer so I can have a few more birdie putts."

Regan has come a long way since seventh grade. She heads into her junior season a more mature player. She said

she has learned how to grind out better scores when she doesn't have her best game and is hitting the ball 20 yards farther than when she was a freshman.

Her mental attitude on the course has changed. Instead of being satisfied at being around par, now she is intent on going lower.

"If I make one or two birdies and I get to a par 5, I'm like going for it," she said. "I don't want to stop and play it safe. I never want to have that mindset of 'OK, we're good.'"

That's a departure from the past.

"I used to be like if I was 2 over, I would just want to finish," she said. "I was never really thinking about going and getting birdies, just thinking about playing it safe and surviving. That's changed a lot."

Combined with her talent, it's that mindset that should have college programs keeping a close watch as Regan enters her junior year.

Now, if she could only settle on the one putter.

BOYS GOLF

'A true champion'

After his mom's death, Lawson still shines

By Gregg Dewalt
For the TimesDaily

HALEYVILLE — Hudson Lawson desperately wanted to play one more hole this high school golf season.

With Lawson as its anchor, Haleyville was on the brink of completing the second round of the Class 4A state tournament at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail's Fighting Joe course and celebrating another championship in front of family and friends.

It was going to be a special celebration, too. After all, Haleyville High School is just 46 miles from the course — almost a home match for the Lions — and plenty of fans had made their way to the course to watch the final round.

But with the last two groups on the final hole of a tournament already shortened to 27 holes due to the threat of severe storms, rain and lightning began to lash the course and play was suspended. After an hour and with rain still falling, officials declared the tournament complete. Scores reverted to the first round and Haleyville, with Lawson leading the way, claimed its third straight title in less than dramatic fashion.

Instead of celebrating on the course with Lawson making the final putt, a subdued trophy celebration was held inside the clubhouse. It's not exactly what Lawson, who claimed medalist honors with a first-round 67, envisioned.

"All the fans and family being there, it would have been awesome," he said recently. "I was dreaming for that last hole since 18 last year after I didn't play very good. I was going through it in my mind about making that last putt and taking it all in."

With all five players returning, Haleyville is favored to win a fourth straight title in 2025. Lawson said it will be a different vibe because the tournament will move to a more southern venue.

"We'll get another chance at it, but it won't be the same," he said. "There won't be as many people there."



Haleyville's Hudson Lawson, who has committed to LSU, led the Lions to a third straight state championship this year. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

Lawson, a rising senior who compiled a stroke average of 68.2 for the Lions and is committed to LSU, repeats as the TimesDaily's boys golfer of the year. His stroke average was four shots better than the next best player in the area — teammate Tyden Steele.

Lawson put together his fine season and repeated as player of the year despite playing through the pain of having lost his mother, Kandi, in October after a battle with cancer. She was 50.

"Golf is kind of a getaway," he said. "It gets me out of the house. Every day you see your mom at your house. Every day when I get home, I walk through the front door and still feel like I am going to see her there. But she's not there, so I try to stay out of the house as much as possible."

Lawson said unwavering support from his teammates and coaches helped him cope with the loss. It's not surprising, given how the team consistently refers to

each other as brothers. Although a well-used cliché, Haleyville's golf team buys into the concept.

"We depend on each other," Lawson said. "I needed them a lot more than they needed me. The team kept me busy and were there for me. When my mom died, for about three days I was not by myself at all. That was a good thing. My best friend (Mac Wilcoxson) was at college at Shorter (University) about three hours away — he drove back and I remember we had just got home. He walked through the basement crying and I immediately started bawling. Little things like that — friends and family being there for you in some hard times."

Haleyville golf coach Jamie White calls Lawson "a true champion" and said he handled his mother's death "like a strong Christian man."

"He has got one full-blooded brother, but he has been surrounded by his golf

brothers," White said. "When you talk to Hudson, he'll tell you he has always played golf, but he's not really playing golf for his mom. Kandi was always a part of our golf team. It was hard to watch him go through that. He has done amazing."

White praised Lawson for his leadership, noting that he is always the first one at the course and the last to leave.

"When we are on a trip on the bus, everybody jumps off because they want to go grab something to eat," he said. "Hudson is the guy who is on the bus walking through and making sure there is no trash and sweeping the bus out."

Lawson has another season of high school golf before heading to LSU. He said he became a better player this season and that he knows his mom is watching.

"I never cannot think about her. She's a part of me," he said. "I know where she is at and it's a whole lot better than where we are at."

GIRLS SOCCER

Gooooals

Hargett finds right sport for her talents in soccer

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Barklee Hargett offered up a smirk and then a short laugh.

The Mars Hill soccer standout was ready. The list had some length to it.

All the sports Hargett decided to give a shot to one time or another. And ... all the sports she decided weren't for her.

"I tried softball. That was really bad. I don't have hand-eye coordination," Hargett said. "I played basketball, volleyball, ran cross country. I went to a golf camp once. That was bad.

"I tried a lot of everything. The hand-eye ones are not for me."

An interesting analysis.

But doesn't one need some type of hand-eye coordination to score goals, especially when the total is more than 30?

"Nah," Hargett corrected. "Foot-eye."

Tough to argue with the results or the numbers. And there were quite a few.

The TimesDaily's girls soccer player of the year scored 56 goals and notched 30 assists over the last two seasons. That included finding the back of the net a team-high 34 times this spring to go along with the 15 others she assisted on. (Although her favorite goal remains the one she scored against Susan Moore her sophomore season, a 30-yarder to help the Panthers reach the Class 1A-3A state semifinals.)

"It was a lot of fun," Hargett said of her senior year. "But that definitely says a lot about our team. It's very much about a team sport and we worked well together. Our defense was solid, our midfield solid and our forwards did a great job."

There's just the matter of how Hargett got into the sport — the one that ended up being the right one for her and most likely caused some consternation among opponents.

Hargett's dad, Douglas, was a baseball standout. One brother, Hugh, was



Barklee Hargett found her stride, and her fair share of goals, once she started playing soccer. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

an All-State basketball player at Mars Hill. Another brother, Beau, is on the Panthers golf team.

(The best athlete in the family, however, might be up for debate based on now vs. then.)

"I just started playing, most little kids play, and I really enjoyed it," said Hargett, who will be attending Auburn as a regular student in the fall. "... I was better at soccer, so I just stuck with it. I liked it kind of being my own thing, too. They had their thing they were good at and I had mine."

Unfortunately for those opposing goalkeepers. Likely a couple of defenders, too. And both are likely to breathe a bit easier next season.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach



Barklee Hargett was cheered more than 30 times after goals this season to the dismay of opposing goalkeepers. [DAVID GLOVACH/TIMESDAILY]

BOYS SOCCER

'Don't stop me now'

Muscle Shoals' Weeks ready to begin next challenge

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Hezekiah Weeks was momentarily stumped.

With the now-former Muscle Shoals standout — and the back-to-back TimesDaily boys soccer player of the year — heading off to college, what's something he was going to need to have for his dorm room?

"That's a great question," said Weeks, who will be playing at Division II North Greenville in South Carolina. "I'm really going to have to think about that one."

It turns out, Weeks didn't have to think too hard. He was already in tune with what he needed most.

"For me, I gotta have a speaker," Weeks said. "I've always got to have music playing. I have music playing 24/7."

An interesting mix, too.

Weeks' musical tastes range, in part, from country — "We're in Alabama" — to rock 'n roll from the 1970s and onward.

"I listen to pretty much anything," Weeks said. "I have some random songs I like more than others. But I do have a couple I listen to before every game."

Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now" is one of his regulars.

Weeks certainly had a good time on the pitch, tallying 18 goals and nine assists for the Trojans.

But as Weeks gets ready to move, there was no question what personal item would be coming with him. That would be his mustache.

"I've grown out this baby since 10th grade," Weeks said proudly. "I've gone and shaved it off every once in a while for something important like scholarships or meetings. I did last year for this, and I said it wasn't happening this year."

So, might the straight-stached Weeks have any further plans for it? Handle-bars? A Fu Manchu? There are a myriad



Hezekiah Weeks is looking forward to playing college soccer at North Greenville in South Carolina. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

of options.

"I like how it is. My dad says it looked like a rat died on my face, but he had frosted tips his senior year, so I don't want to hear it," Weeks said with a laugh. "My dad had the boy band look."

Perhaps a Backstreet Boys or NSYNC throwback for those old enough to wonder. But that's for another day.

There's still the matter of getting ready for a new season, one that will begin in the fall instead of the spring.

So, eager to get the college soccer experience started?

"Honestly, yeah," Weeks said. "I've been playing since I could walk. I really hoped I would (be playing in college), otherwise it would have been a complete

waste of time. But I always thought I would keep playing and I'm ready for college soccer."

"I'm excited to move and get to experience a new scene, new people."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

SMALL SCHOOL SOFTBALL

Monster Mash

Marks, after basketball, thrives in second sport

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

The interlude between Shila Marks' two seasons didn't last long.

A day after a basketball regional championship loss, one that still stings, Marks was pounding away some frustration with a softball bat.

It normally doesn't take long for her to switch sports, Marks said, but this year's transition meant a little more.

"Any time I end a season like I did in basketball, it always fuels me for my next sport, which happens to be softball," Marks said. "It fuels my drive to play."

Marks, after basketball's disappointing end, spent the spring on a high-octane softball binge.

The TimesDaily's small school player of the year mentally lingered for a few days, but it didn't take long before the junior started mashing.

"It was a hard loss. A day after basketball, I got into softball," Marks said. "I knew what I had to work for so we could get to regionals. I used that to fuel my drive for a sport I love. I think I did a whole lot better than I have before."

"Finally."

Marks helped lead the Lauderdale County girls basketball team to the Northwest Regional championship game, and she was 2-for-15 from the field and scored nine points in an 18-point season-ending loss to Clements.

Eight days later, the Tigers started their softball season. Marks scored four runs in two wins.

When it ended 10 weeks later, she had a 1.478 OPS, was 25-for-25 on steals and had scored 75 times in 44 games. Lauderdale County, after missing the North Regional when Marks was a sophomore, won its area title and snared a regional berth again before finishing 29-15.

"I would say both (basketball and



Lauderdale County's Shila Marks made a quick transition from an All-State basketball season to be a major softball star for the Tigers. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

softball) were actually pretty good," Marks said. "This was one of my most fun years. It was my teammates. There was a different chemistry because we're together now."

"It's more who we all grew up with."

Marks said she is already preparing and excited over her senior year with camps and some travel ball. No, she will not branch out into a third sport to fill the early part of her fall semester.

"I thought about playing volleyball before, but I didn't want it to get in the way of my College GameDay Saturdays," Marks said. "I love watching football."

Basketball and softball have her playing devotion.

"Basketball was a great year. We lost in the regionals, but we're hopefully coming back next year and winning the state tournament," Marks said. "In softball, it was a great year, too. We made it to regionals also, and hopefully we'll get to state tournament next year."

Marks has already cemented her status as Lauderdale County's top hitter and basketball shooter. Sorry, baseball Tigers.

"I didn't say it," Marks said. "That's all I have to say. I didn't say it."



Shila Marks found her way home 75 times in 44 games this spring for Lauderdale County.

LARGE SCHOOL SOFTBALL

Hotty Toddy?

Brooks' Herndon ready for next step at Ole Miss

By A. Stacy Long
Sports Writer

Abby Herndon makes a few slight changes, a wee bit of amending, when she cuts loose with her school-to-be's traditional fan chant.

The Brooks pitcher/slugger has definitely learned all the words for Ole Miss' famed cheer. She's just not ready to regale any audience with the full, unadulterated version.

At least quite yet.

Some of the salty language — albeit just of a table-salt variety — won't cross her lips.

"Hotty Toddy, Gosh almighty, who the heck are we? Hey," says the TimesDaily's large school softball player of the year, pausing for an instant just before each of her edits.

"Flim flam, bim, bam. Ole Miss, by dang."

Herndon signed with Ole Miss in November and has long developed an affinity for the Rebels, blue language or not.

The cheer was not something that needed a great amount of study. A mere single weekend trip to campus, and Herndon had it down (close to) pat.

"One football game," she said. "They chant it a lot."

Herndon is set to report to campus in mid-August, and her new teammates will help her move in. At that point, she'll stroll across The Grove as a student and start adjusting.

"I'm starting to get nervous, but not about softball," Herndon said. "I'm nervous about college life and everything."

Herndon is well supplied as far as Ole Miss attire, and that's before the school-provided swag she'll collect when she gets to campus.

"Over the last two years, I have a lot of stuff," Herndon said. "Tons of shirts and sweatshirts. I even have a pair of shoes.



Abby Herndon will soon discard her Brooks orange for some Ole Miss red and blue. [PHOTOS BY DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

I'll probably be really decked out when I get the gear when I get there."

As far as cowbells, she has developed an antipathy. For some reason.

"It's not a good sound. They're kind of annoying, especially when I'm on the field," Herndon said, predicting her distaste would likely grow.

"Especially since our rival is Mississippi State. They're the cowbell school."

Herndon plans to major in accounting, citing her love for "numbers and math," which is an odd coincidence for someone who piled up such big numbers this year at Brooks.

At the plate, she hit a measly .642 with 13 home runs and 68 RBIs in 109 at-bats. Throwing to the plate, she had a 1.10 ERA with a .152 average against in 146 innings. Herndon helped lead the Lions to a Class 4A runner-up finish.

"I think ERA is the biggest one I look at," Herndon said. "With how many innings I pitch, I like to see that number low."



Abby Herndon was in the middle of a lot of Brooks' success this season.

SMALL SCHOOL BASEBALL

Miles ahead

Edwards made life difficult for opponents

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Miles Edwards admitted his game isn't in the best shape at the moment.

Errant hits, misdirected balls, tough bounces, some bad breaks.

All things that can certainly lead to a little bit of frustration most days.

"Let's just say I'm not the best golfer," Edwards said with a smirk. "More like, instead of Tiger Woods, I'm Tiger in the Woods. I play more out of the rough than the fairway."

Edwards, of course, might only head to the golf course every now and then.

After all, the TimesDaily's small school baseball player of the year — for the second straight season — didn't have a whole lot of free time during the spring.

The Lauderdale County standout spent his senior season frustrating opponents in a myriad of ways.

Edwards hit .486, drove in 30 runs and scored 30 times in 31 games. He slugged .651 and had a .541 on-base percentage.

On the mound, he compiled a 6-1 record with a 1.60 ERA and a .142 average against in 57 innings. He struck out 78 and walked 29.

Oh, and Edwards happened to be named the Class 3A player of the year last week by the Alabama Sports Writers Association — again for the second straight year. On Sunday, he was named to the ASWA's Super All-State team.

"It's bittersweet," Edwards said of playing his final high school season. "I'm looking forward to college baseball and the next challenge, but high school baseball will always be special to me. That's where your closest friends are made. I grew up with those guys."

Edwards is signed to play baseball at Wallace State-Hanceville.



Miles Edwards racked up plenty of baseball accolades during his final season at Lauderdale County. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

So, will it be hitting? Maybe, pitching? "Hopefully it's both," Edwards said. "I was told I would get a shot in the field, but I'm mainly going for pitching. But I hope I get a shot in the field because I like hitting. I'm not ready to give it up just yet."

"Hitting is my favorite part. I like a challenge."

And that might be what Edwards is eager for the most. Something a little different to test his skills against.

"Just that competitiveness," Edwards said. "You got however many guys on the roster and everyone has to compete to play and then you're playing a team with another however many guys that

are wanting to compete and play.

"I'm excited. I'm looking forward to it." Those golf improvements, it seems, will likely have to wait.

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

Ace of base

Chatterton may have choice to make and he's OK with that

By David Glovach
Sports Writer

Christian Chatterton had his reasons. Nothing too crazy. It's just that something a little different was in order.

So, the Brooks standout decided a different hairstyle was the way to go.

"I'm going shorter on the sides and I haven't really touched the back," Chatterton said.

It'll certainly be a busy offseason for the TimesDaily's large school baseball player of the year. He already has a rather full summer schedule lined up.

And well ... might as well look your best.

Chatterton had been invited to throw in front of "a few MLB teams" ahead of July's draft. He's also set to move to Auburn — where he'll possibly play baseball — on June 24.

"Obviously, I have some nerves with it, but not too much," Chatterton said of the throwing sessions. "I've put in the work because in my mind, no one's outworking me. If that's the case in my mind, then there's no real reason to be nervous about it."

Chatterton's numbers during his final season with the Lions would certainly back that up.

At the plate, Chatterton slugged .720 and finished with a .556 on-base percentage in 26 games. He scored 24 times and had 20 RBIs.

But it was on the mound Chatterton was at his best. He went 6-1 with an 0.95 ERA and 88 strikeouts in 44 ⅓ innings.

Chatterton was named the Class 4A player of the year by the Alabama Sports Writers Association last week and was named to the Super All-State team on Sunday.

Then there's the draft evaluations.

Chatterton was listed as the 94th prospect by The Athletic's Keith Law in May. He's the 283rd prospect, according to Future Stars Series and the 18th best prep prospect by Prospects Live.



Christian Chatterton will see what level he'll compete at next after having little trouble against high school competition. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

"Growing up, my dream was to play in the MLB and to be a professional baseball player," Chatterton said. "At the same time, Auburn could be a step towards that. I look at it as a win-win situation, either way. I have a set number I'd want to get if I'm drafted and if I don't get it, I'm happy to go to college."

And should he head to Auburn, there's just the matter of what he'd need for his dorm room.

So, what's the must-have?

"I have one. It's unrealistic," Chatterton said. "I have a little sauna at my house and I'm trying to convince my parents to let me bring it. I just don't know if that's going to happen and how we'd get that in the dorm."

Hey, where there's a will, there's a way.

But whatever ends up happening, it'll certainly be something to remember.

"I think we're all excited," Chatterton

said. "I know for my dad, I'm kind of living out his dream. He played baseball at Liberty University. He never played pro ball, so seeing me hopefully have a chance to do that, is making him very happy. My mom has been great. I have a good support system behind me."

David Glovach can be reached at david.glovach@timesdaily.com or on Twitter @DavidGlovach

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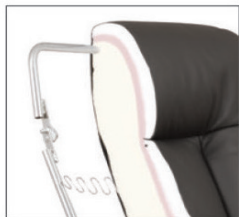
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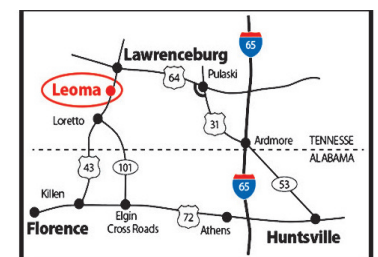
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