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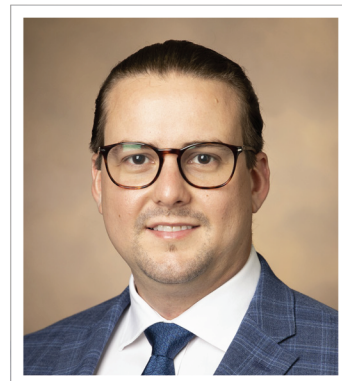
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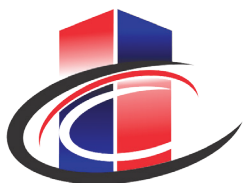
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Where champions are made

Our hometown courts and fields introduce stars to the game.

THE CROWD fills the stands, row after row, of people in our high school's colors. The family in front of you sits down with a fresh hot dog from the concession stand. It's still steaming with a drizzle of ketchup laced across the top from end to end. It smells so good you think you "just might have to go to the concession stand and get your own." On the way there, you run into your old favorite teacher. You run into your old high school crush, wave, and maybe catch up. In the background, the scoreboard keeps ticking up, and the crowd's roar gets louder. The moths and other critters dance around the floodlights tens of feet in the air.

We've all experienced what it feels like to be at a high school football game under the Friday night lights. We know what it feels like to get the jitters as the first play begins — the excitement when our team scores the first touchdown. For towns across the country, sports like high school football bring us together. It gives cheerleaders the experience of a lifetime, pushing them to perform impressive stunts, flips, and lifts. The band students learn to perform in front of hundreds of people and how to work together to

make art. Hometown games are a perfect mixture of fun, family, nostalgia, and teamwork.

Healthy competition teaches things you can't learn alone at a desk. It shows the band, the players, and the cheerleaders how to have discipline. It shows them how to treat others. It pushes them to be humble and show sportsmanship. Because while we win today, next week may hand us a rough defeat. These qualities help make our town a better place. And the good news is — our town isn't the only place building up the next generation of young leaders. Schools across the nation, from California to Maine, are showing students what it means to be a team player.

As we grow older, we run out of time to do the things we love. We forget what it feels like to sit in the crowded stands with a warm hotdog in our hand and balance Dr. Pepper in our lap after sitting down. There's a hidden treasure in our county, and we shouldn't take it for granted. Hometown sports have shaped who we are, and they'll shape the next generation — and the one after that. Our hometown courts and fields introduce stars to the game.

This is where champions are made. GN

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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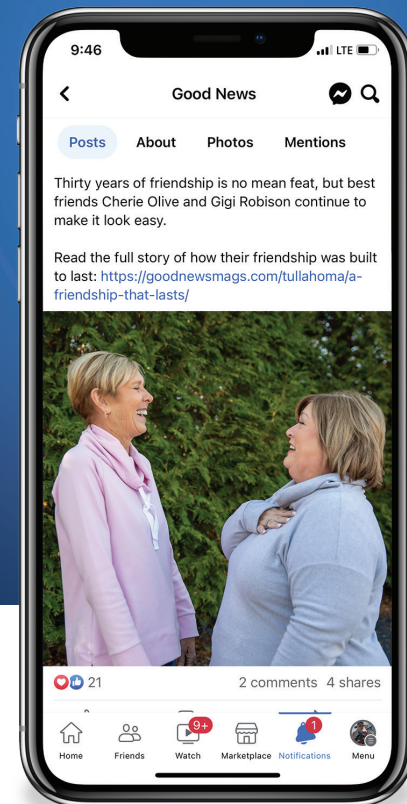
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Kris Potts-Howard





A FAMILY OF CHAMPIONS

Kris Potts-Howard's family's illustrious track and field legacy

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

THE CLAMOR of the crowd at Tom Black Track filled the air as a small boy, barely 4 years old, was hoisted high above the grounds by his father. Giant shadows stretched from the packed bleachers, engulfing the legendary track field where legends were made, and this moment epitomized the ongoing tradition of athletic greatness. With wide eyes and a racing heart, Kris Potts-Howard encountered a world that would soon become his own.

Potts-Howard's family's illustrious track and field legacy made it clear early on that this was the path he should take. His maternal grandfather, Ronnie Potts, blazed his own trail as an All-American jumper at Austin Peay State University, and his father,

Michael Howard, achieved All-American status at the University of Tennessee.

"There are pictures of my dad holding me over the Tom Black Track in Knoxville when I was just 3 or 4," Potts-Howard recalled.

This early exposure laid the foundation for a lifelong love of the sport.

Growing up in Tullahoma, Potts-Howard embraced a culture of athletic excellence that extended beyond his family. He excelled in multiple sports in high school but truly flourished in track and field. He was just one of many standouts on the Wildcats team. Specializing in the long jump and triple jump, Potts-Howard became a two-time state champion. Despite his talent in

other sports like baseball and football, track remained his passion.

"Track was just something that stuck with me and something that I really loved," he explained.

The community of Tullahoma propelled him closer to his dreams. The support and recognition he received from locals further drove him to unlock his athletic potential. This uplifting environment shaped his character and defined his track and field career. He knew he wasn't just competing for himself but for the entire community that had his back.

Potts-Howard's transition to collegiate athletics required a shift in focus. At Carson-Newman University, he concentrated on the long jump due to hip problems that



▲ Kris Potts-Howard with his high school track head coach, Maurice Shaw, at Tullahoma High School's track on July 2, 2024

halted his triple jump career. Nonetheless, his hard work and dedication to improving his athletic abilities earned him All-American honors. His collegiate experience at Carson-Newman was transformative athletically and personally.

“Carson-Newman has a very big family atmosphere, which is a key reason I stayed for four years. My love for my teammates and coaches kept me there,” Potts-Howard said.

Reflecting on his inspirations and mentors, he credits his father and grand-

father as influential figures in his life. His grandfather's passing during his sophomore year of high school was a devastating yet pivotal moment, driving him to persevere and dedicate his achievements to his memory.

“At that time, I had a lot of people [who] were always telling me, ‘You can give up and quit what you're doing, or you can really persevere and push through, and this can be a new chapter in your life.’ And I really wasn't complacent with being average. I never have been and probably never will be,” he said.

Professional athletes like Christian Taylor also influenced his triple jump, and legendary coach Vince Anderson, who had coached his father, provided substantial guidance during his early years.

Potts-Howard's unexpected venture into coaching began at his alma mater, Carson-Newman. Despite initial reluctance, he found great satisfaction in guiding and mentoring young athletes.

“I didn't want to coach at first, but I get more joy from coaching than from competing. Being able to impact athletes,



▲ Kris Potts-Howard with his girlfriend, Samantha Goad, at Tullahoma High School on July 2, 2024



You can give up and quit what you're doing, or you can really persevere and push through, and this can be a new chapter in your life.

- Kris Potts-Howard

especially at an institution where I had been, was a blessing," he reflected.

His coaching philosophy is centered around mental strength and discipline. Transitioning to a coaching role at a Division 1 university, Potts-Howard emphasizes the importance of being meticulous and disciplined.

"You've got to be locked into what you're doing. At the Division 1 level, you can't afford to slack. Discipline is key," he said.

Potts-Howard aspires to reach even greater heights in his coaching career. His ultimate dream is to coach at the University of Tennessee, where his father's legacy began.

"As a legacy child, I would love to coach at Tennessee. It's a dream goal of mine," he revealed.

Potts-Howard has had a strong support system throughout his career,

including his girlfriend, Samantha, who has been instrumental during his coaching transitions. This support, his relentless drive, and the lessons he learned from his mentors, has positioned him for continuous success.

Potts-Howard's path from a small town to the brink of coaching at the highest levels of collegiate athletics is a source of inspiration for aspiring athletes and coaches.

"No matter where you are, there are people out there who want to help you achieve your goals. You can do whatever you set your mind to," he said.

Potts-Howard's story is a compelling reminder that we can achieve anything with discipline, focus, and the right support system. And his journey, like those of many other community champions, is far from over. **GN**

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Randy Ashby and his daughter,
Leslie Copeland, on his four-wheeler
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Leslie Copeland harvests success.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

GROWING UP on a farm teaches you a lot about life — hard work, commitment, respect, and the resilience to get back up when you fall. For Leslie Copeland, these lessons have profoundly shaped her life and career, making her a true champion. Copeland's childhood on her family farm instilled the values that would later become the cornerstone of her success.

“I am the oldest of four children, which meant I was the leader in my mind, and my siblings simply thought I was bossy,” she recalled.

She refined her leadership skills early on, managing sibling disputes and ensuring they completed their chores efficiently.

Little did Copeland know that joining 4-H in the fourth grade would be a turning point. Through these organizations, she developed responsibility, accountability, and leadership skills that would prove valuable in supporting her family, community, and the environment. From public speaking and demonstration contests to parliamentary procedure and 4-H Congress, Copeland absorbed abundant knowledge that she continues to use daily.

One significant challenge Copeland faced was halter-breaking her first market lamb. He got twisted in the lead while tied to the fence and didn't survive the incident. This painful experience taught her about the inevitability of risk and failure.

“There were other accidents and challenges throughout the years. Eventually, I recognized things out of your control will happen. For farmers and business owners, navigating risk is a daily task, whether it's the weather, sickness or disease, market fluctuations, competition, or equipment breaking.”

With enough time passing by and plenty of reassurance from her parents, eventually, she realized that it wasn't her fault but rather an unforeseen accident and risk. This level of understanding has been crucial in her business endeavors, helping her anticipate risks and develop contingency plans.

Copeland's triumphs are as vivid as her challenges. Winning showmanship classes with her cattle and sheep stands out. In livestock shows, the judge selects the winner based on the animal's structure for breeding stock and composition and structure for market stock.



Carver, Dain, and Leslie Copeland with Randy Ashby, posing together at their home and amongst Leslie's carefully cultivated flowers.

However, showmanship is different. It's about the showman's skills — how well they trained and presented the stock. These victories validated her years of hard work, focus, and dedication and showed her the importance of focus and perseverance in achieving desired outcomes.

Today, Copeland balances her professional life with her love for the farm.

"My dad, at age 76, is in better shape than most of us — we can thank his farming lifestyle for this," she said proudly.

Copeland, her husband, and their son live on the nearly 500-acre farm. They tend to their five acres and help with various farm tasks. What she looks forward to

most is getting outside and embracing the earth with their hands.

Farm life isn't always easy. It comes with moments of physical and mental difficulty. But, despite the challenges, the farm remains a source of therapy and fulfillment for Copeland. The Ashby family, from whom Copeland hails, has deep roots in their land, with a legacy that stretches back to the early 1800s. Her third great-grandfather landed in Mimosa in the early 1800s, and her great-grandfather built the house at 165 Mimosa in 1912. This rich history fuels her commitment to continuing the farming tradition for future generations.

"Our family roots are deep in this land. My sisters, brother, and I — in some form or fashion — plan to carry on the farming tradition for our children and grandchildren."

Copeland's professional journey has been equally impressive. She has participated in the Leadership Lincoln program, served on the library board, and currently serves on the American Red Cross Heart of Tennessee board. In addition to Ascend's strategic marketing and business development, she also leads philanthropic and community efforts, working with partners like Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee and The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee.



“At Ascend, we have a strong belief that our success as a credit union is tied to the success of our members and our community,” she emphasized.

Copeland sees exciting changes in Tennessee’s agriculture. She predicts that farmers will use new technologies to grow crops more efficiently and protect the environment. She believes in the importance of farmers adapting to changes and being open to agritourism opportunities while also relishing the wonderful produce they provide to the community.

Throughout her career, Copeland has worked with many excellent leaders and learned valuable lessons from them. Through their example, Copeland understands the impact of assembling solid teams and creating a culture of integrity, trust, respect, and teamwork. Copeland’s professional dream is to continue making a positive impact at Ascend while advancing community efforts that improve the lives of Middle Tennesseans.

“It’s about finding fulfillment in family and farm life, nurturing those connections,



and passing down the legacy of stewardship to future generations,” she said.

Copeland epitomizes dedication, hard work, and community. Her inspiring journey from the farm to leadership positions in business and philanthropy showcases the values she holds dear. She is a dedicated champion committed to making a positive impact in all areas of her life. **GN**

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THE THRILL OF THE GAME

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

A small-town dreamer on the big league stage

SAM MELTON perched on the edge of the bench, the buzz of spring training swirling around him — but his focus was solely on Ted Williams. The legendary hitter's gaze was sharp as he analyzed the young players, predicting which ones had the grit to succeed and which ones would stumble. Williams seemed to take a particular interest in Melton, offering advice that was both insightful and nerve-wracking. Melton listened intently. He allowed the words to sink in. At that moment, Melton knew Williams was giving him a glimpse into the delicate balance between passion and longevity in the sport he loved.

Melton fell in love with sports at a young age, and in this community, he found a fierce passion for baseball. This sport allowed him to shine as an individual and a team player. The game was personal for Melton — a solo dance with the ball that demanded great focus and skill.

“Baseball got me because it was a team game played as an individual. It is you and the ball,” he said.

Growing up, Melton's older brother inspired him. He let Melton tag along to the high school field, where they hit, threw, and shagged balls. The seven-year age gap meant Melton had to step up early, developing quick reflexes and a keen eye from the intense practice sessions.

“I enjoyed watching my older brother grow up playing. And seeing his hard work to be the best he could — I just caught the bug.”



Sam Melton



It wasn't just his brother who influenced his love for the game, but also his supportive parents and sister. His sister cheered on the sidelines at his and his brother's games, and the family continues to support and cheer on his kids from the stands.

Influenced by legends like George Brett, whose passion and emotion resonated with him, Melton pursued his dream relentlessly.

"I got to meet George in my first year of winter ball. He's a fierce competitor on the field."

After signing with Auburn University right out of high school, he quickly made a name for himself. Melton became an unstoppable force with his natural speed, strong arm, batting skills, quick hands, and instincts. Scouts came to see stars like Bo Jackson, Gregg Olson, and Paul Foster, but Melton's outstanding performance didn't go unnoticed. However, his greatest challenge was his mindset.

"I thought you had to be perfect, and any little mistake drove me crazy. I hated losing more than I enjoyed winning. Winning was what you were supposed to do — losing was not."

Despite his intense drive, Melton learned from baseball legends like Ted Williams, who warned him about mental fatigue and the unsustainable nature of his high-strung playing style.

"He told me I was born in the wrong era. He said I played too hard for the era and would run out of passion for the game if I kept playing that way. He said, 'It will be mental fatigue for you.'"

The balance between intensity and longevity became a crucial aspect of his journey — one he continued to navigate throughout his career.

Melton's proudest moments often came during his winter ball seasons, where he achieved remarkable feats like going 9-for-9 in a stretch, achieving perfection for a brief but unforgettable period. These moments were the pinnacle of his playing days — memories that he cherishes deeply.

"Getting to play the game of baseball was the most fun I had. The friends from wiffle ball games, Little League,

“
Getting to play the game of baseball was the most fun I had. The friends from wiffle ball games, Little League, Babe Ruth, summer leagues, high school, college, and professional — those were the best times.

- Sam Melton



Babe Ruth, summer leagues, high school, college, and professional — those were the best times.”

Transitioning into the role of a coach and mentor, Melton discovered a new passion: helping young athletes find their paths to success. His coaching philosophy involves removing mental barriers and giving young athletes confidence.

One of Melton’s greatest joys is seeing the light come on in a young player’s eyes, witnessing the moment they realize their potential.

Off the field, Melton’s greatest accomplishments are his children. Watching

Brody, Lily, and Blake pursue their athletic dreams fills him with pride and a sense of fulfillment that surpasses any accolade from his playing days.

“Brody plays college baseball, Lily is on her way to play college basketball, and Blake will be a freshman the ‘24-’25 school year.”

In addition to his family and coaching, Melton has another passion: architecture.

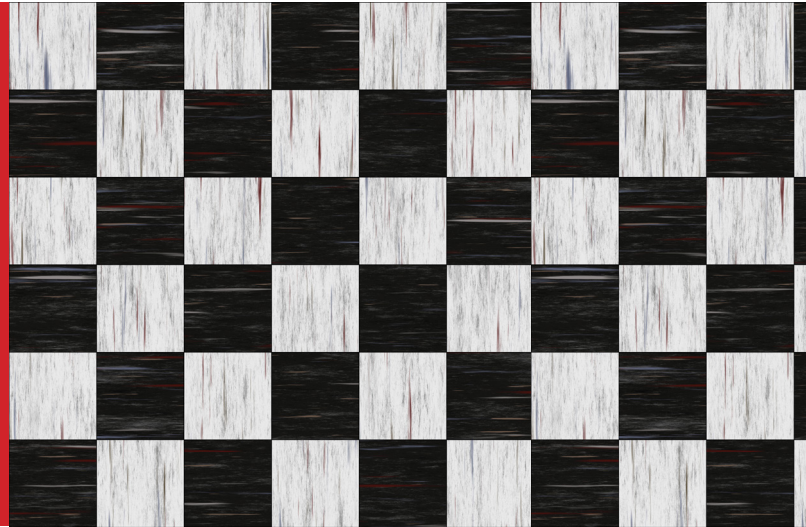
“I enjoy people, and I enjoyed watching my dad build things as a kid, but I have always loved architecture. I really love unique architecture. I build a lot on Tims Ford Lake and [in] Winchester.”

His desire for perfection and commitment to excellence drives his work as a local contractor, much like his approach to baseball.

“I have guys who have worked with me for 20 years, so we have a close relationship. I work with a lot of good people. It is very stressful at times but overall very satisfying to see it all come together.”

Melton’s love for baseball has defined his remarkable journey. Where will this journey take him next? Perhaps to new coaching heights, or maybe just another sunrise spent reacquainting himself with the pure joy of the game. **GN**

BITE INTO BLISS



Friendly faces and fantastic flavors await at Damron's.

DAMRON'S RESTAURANT is more than just a great place for breakfast or lunch — it is a Tullahoma institution. This small family restaurant serves both breakfast and lunch all day, so everyone is sure to find something they love to eat! Damron's has easily become a family favorite because I love breakfast, but my husband would rather eat just about anything besides traditional breakfast food.

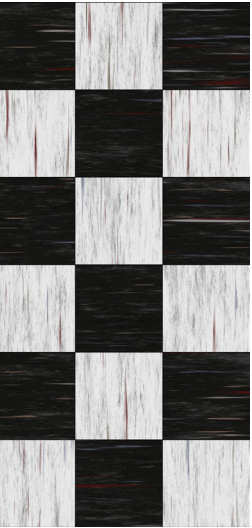
Entering Damron's transports you to a simpler time — it has a “quaint diner” atmosphere with friendly faces and a kitchen that delivers excellence every single time. The smell of grease and fresh coffee welcomes you as you sit and debate over what to order because everything looks good.

I lean toward the breakfast options because gravy and biscuits are my love language. Damron's also offers daily specials for a great price, and my last trip rewarded me with a special that paired my beloved gravy and biscuits with a loaded meat-lovers omelet that was thick, fluffy, and oh-so-savory! And, of course, I accompanied it with a Mason jar full of Diet Coke and some crispy, salty home fries.

While I excitedly dove into my breakfast extravaganza, my husband enjoyed his always-perfect cheeseburger and crinkle fries. Damron's cheeseburgers are thick and juicy. And the price? Perfection. Damron's is always full of locals because the food is fresh and delicious, and the prices are affordable. It reminds you that you don't have to break the bank to enjoy a meal out with family or friends.

Damron's also offers country-style meat-and-three plates with options like chicken and dumplings, meatloaf, mashed potatoes, green beans, and all of the down-home favorites. My aunt was recently passing through from out of town and excitedly





texted to tell me she had been in Tullahoma and stopped at Damron's. She opted for the meat-and-three plate and told me I just had to go there for lunch soon if I hadn't been before because the food was so good!

Another thing that makes Damron's special is its community involvement. Come To The Table is a Tullahoma nonprofit that provides supper for the community, and Damron's Restaurant hosts it. Every Tuesday, a team of volunteers feeds more than 125 people a free meal! The generosity and love for the community is evident in everything Damron's does, from offering free fresh fruits and vegetables and shelf-stable items to neighbors to holding a clothing closet and working to meet other needs of the community.

So, next time you and your family can't agree on what to eat for an early to midday meal, give Damron's a try! The restaurant is open Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., and Sunday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. It serves a full menu of delicious offerings all day. **GN**

GOOD NEWS IS COMING TO DINNER!

We will feature a local food critic's thoughts as they dine in Tullahoma. This month Tabitha Buckner visited Damron's Restaurant.

DAMRON'S RESTAURANT

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TULLAHOMA HIGH SCHOOL

2024 Football Schedule

DAY	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Friday	Aug. 23, 2024	AWAY @ Stewarts Creek High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 30, 2024	Coffee County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 6, 2024	Rockvale High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 13, 2024	AWAY @ Franklin County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 20, 2024	Lincoln County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 27, 2024	AWAY @ Columbia High School	7 p.m.
Thursday	Oct. 3, 2024	AWAY @ Lawrence County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 11, 2024	AWAY @ Warren County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 25, 2024	Spring Hill High School	7 p.m.
Thursday	Nov. 1, 2024	Shelbyville Central High School	7 p.m.

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2024 Football Schedule

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Friday	Aug. 23, 2024	Cascade High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 30, 2024	AWAY @ Fayetteville High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 6, 2024	AWAY @ Eagleville High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 13, 2024	Wayne County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 20, 2024	AWAY @ Franklin County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 27, 2024	Cornersville High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 11, 2024	Collinwood High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 18, 2024	AWAY @ Huntland High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 25, 2024	Forrest High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Nov. 1, 2024	AWAY @ Richland High School	7 p.m.



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RILEY DARDEN

***THE POWER OF
COLLABORATION***





Riley Darden makes a difference in everything he does.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

THE LABORATORY was lit with progress. It was like an energetic spark had permeated the room. Riley Darden, a skilled laboratory consultant, carefully arranged rows of colorful test tubes on a rack. Each vial held a sample, representing tiny puzzle pieces waiting to be solved. However, unlike the intricate pieces of furniture he crafted in his woodshop right inside the lab, the solutions held the potential to revolutionize health care. His brow furrowed in concentration, a scientist at work, yet a hint of a familiar play strategy

lingered in his mind — the strategic mind of a coach never sleeps entirely. This was Riley Darden, a man carving his path in woodworking, coaching, and the future of medicine, and his story was just beginning to unfold.

Darden is a true Renaissance man who excels as a woodworker, a laboratory consultant revolutionizing health care, and a sports analyst on 93.8 The Duck (WDUC) with a knack for explaining football, softball, and baseball, and even a college football coach. What's the secret to his success? His immense loyalty to the

community and the mindset that every day is an opportunity to make a difference in the world. His philosophy of going the extra mile to understand others is a constant thread throughout his life.

He said, "I've never wanted to do anything but follow my dreams and help other people. Helping other people really fills my cup."

After finishing his last semester at Tennessee Tech University, where he played football, Darden took a gap semester before attending Cumberland University and signed a contract to use



I don't aspire to drive a brand new car or live in a big, fancy house. I simply aspire to comfort my family and those around me.

RILEY DARDEN

his crafting expertise, creating custom Tennessee state outlines out of wood with Jack Daniels. His wood-working passion project, inspired by his grandfather, Ray Darden, and his great uncle, blossomed into a successful business.

“My grandfather, Ray Darden, and my great uncle taught me how to build my first Adirondack chair back in 2017. So I fell in love with woodwork from that day forward.”

Darden finds immense satisfaction in creating beautiful pieces and connecting with his customers. It's a creative outlet that allows him to express himself while connecting with the community on a deeper level.

However, Darden's inclination to help others took a more profound turn in 2019. Watching his beloved grandmother struggle with a misdiagnosed illness due to inaccurate culture testing motivated him to make a change. He partnered with Kirk Writtenberry, a lab

consultant he met through woodworking, aiming to bring the most accurate and efficient medical testing to Tullahoma.

Their solution, introduced by Taylor Bright and Dr. Gibbs, led them to a groundbreaking mouthwash toxicology test, Quiksal — one of the first to be introduced to Tennessee. This innovative test eliminates the need for uncomfortable procedures and provides faster, more accurate results.

“Taylor Bright and Dr. Gibbs out of Kentucky created Quiksal to better service clinics from a collection and accuracy standpoint and for faster turnaround time as well. It will also help communities by decreasing drug addiction,” he said. “This Quiksal toxicology exam has been an eye-opener for me. Anyone can go and do whatever they want to. They just have to believe it and then create a plan to make it come true.”

Even with his role as a lab consultant and his woodworking business,

he still finds time to share his love for football as a coach at Cumberland University, where he coaches wide receivers. Despite his busy schedule, Darden finds coaching incredibly rewarding. But more importantly, he sees it as an opportunity to mentor young athletes and instill the same values he learned on the field.

“I’m finally able to spread my wings and bring even more creativity to the wide receiver position that I love so much,” he expressed.

Balancing all these pursuits requires meticulous planning and a strong work ethic. Darden keeps a detailed calendar and leans on the support of his family — including his dad, who helps with the woodworking business — and fellow sports commentators like Will Rabb. He maintains a positive outlook and encourages people to pursue their dreams and put all their efforts into what they are passionate about.

“Don’t be stuck in your safe zone,” he advised. “You have to wake up every single day to change someone else’s life, and not just your own. Find things that you care about that will allow you to change another person’s life.”

Darden is a phenomenal example of an individual driven by purpose. From the intricate details of his woodworking to the cutting-edge science of Quiksal, Darden is a true gem, leaving his mark on the community.

“I don’t aspire to drive a brand new car or live in a big, fancy house. I simply aspire to comfort my family and those around me.”

Darden would like to thank God, his family (his parents Tommy and Cam Darden, and his sister Tabitha Sehorne), Kirk Rittenberry, Will Rabb, Taylor Bright, Dr. Gibbs, Coach Mathis, Dr. Drummond, and Dr. George Walker for their support and guidance as he continues to live out his dreams and serve the community with compassion. **GN**





AVERY SMITH

**AVERY'S
VICTORY
LAP**

Overcoming obstacles and finding joy in the Special Olympics.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

THE CICADAS buzzed a summer song as a blur of white and orange zipped through Tullahoma High School's track field. Laughter and cheers filled the atmosphere, accompanied by the *thump* of a softball hitting a mitt. Avery Smith, a streak of sunshine with a beaming smile, propelled the ball across the field, pumping his fist in the air. His mother, Holly Smith, watched closely, her eyes glistening with pride and joy. Supportive families and friends engaged in outbursts of cheer and excitement for their participants. This wasn't just any game. It was the Special Olympics Lower Cumberland Region, and for Avery, with it came the promise of not just victory but friendship, fun, and — most importantly — food.

Since the age of 8, Avery has been on an incredible journey with the Special Olympics. He has developed many skills and learned many lessons, including the importance of perseverance. The main event usually takes place on May 9 at Tullahoma High School. Afterward, participants celebrate with Chick-fil-A or burgers grilled by Jeff Stroop. Aside from excelling in softball throwing and running, Avery's favorite part is the food and the friendships he gains.

Holly said, "Being 'Mr. Social Butterfly,' the relationships mean the most to

him. He isn't competing — he's having fun with friends."

In 2019, Avery was unable to run, but he didn't let that stop him. Instead, he walked the 50-meter dash. In the summer of 2022, Avery underwent surgery to lengthen his Achilles tendon and hamstring. In 2023, the city participated in its first Special Olympics since 2019. Holly initially hesitated to let him participate so soon after his surgery, but she eventually decided that Avery had already made up his mind. When the 2023 Special

Avery Smith and his biggest cheerleader, Holly Smith, at Tullahoma High School's Track on June 26, 2024





These children help each other and generally care for each other. It is very heartwarming.

HOLLY SMITH

Olympics came around, he actually ran the 50-meter dash — an amazing accomplishment that shocked and amazed Holly.

“I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I knew he could run, but I had no idea he could *run*,” she shared.

Avery’s decision not only boosted his confidence but also inspired his mother. At that point, she was confident that he had made the right decision.

“He was as proud of himself as I was of him. He was laughing, and I was crying. It was the happiest moment ever.”

The event also caused Holly to reflect on the day she gave birth and the trying moment when she received the news that he wouldn’t survive.

“Avery had a stroke before he was born, and we were told he wouldn’t live to be 2 years old,” she said.

Avery faced various health challenges, including frequent seizures as a baby.

Thanks to an excellent neurologist, his seizures are now under control. He had delayed speech until the age of 5 and started to walk unassisted at age 4. He has received treatment at TOP Rehab Services since he was 4 months old.

So, fast-forward to the Olympic Games. Seeing her miracle — now teen — participating in the activities with vigor and pure joy brings her to tears. It proves to her that obstacles are just mere building blocks toward a fulfilling life.

“My son is running and jumping and having a ball. He doesn’t care if he comes in first or last. He’s just having fun.”

Aside from perseverance, Avery has developed an unfathomable level of confidence, defying expectations and soaring beyond his wildest dreams. Once a timid young athlete, he’s now shooting hoops with other kids at Moore County High School, inspired by the spirit of the games.

“Now he just jumps on in and says, ‘Throw me the ball,’” Holly explained.

She highly recommends that everyone experience a Special Olympics event. The smiles and high fives of good sportsmanship are just a few highlights for this proud mom. Avery often recognizes kids from other schools around Middle Tennessee at local events. The atmosphere is always filled with smiles, laughter, and, in Avery’s case, lots of hugs.

“These children help each other and generally care for each other. It is very heartwarming.”

The foundation of Holly and Avery’s lives is their strong faith.

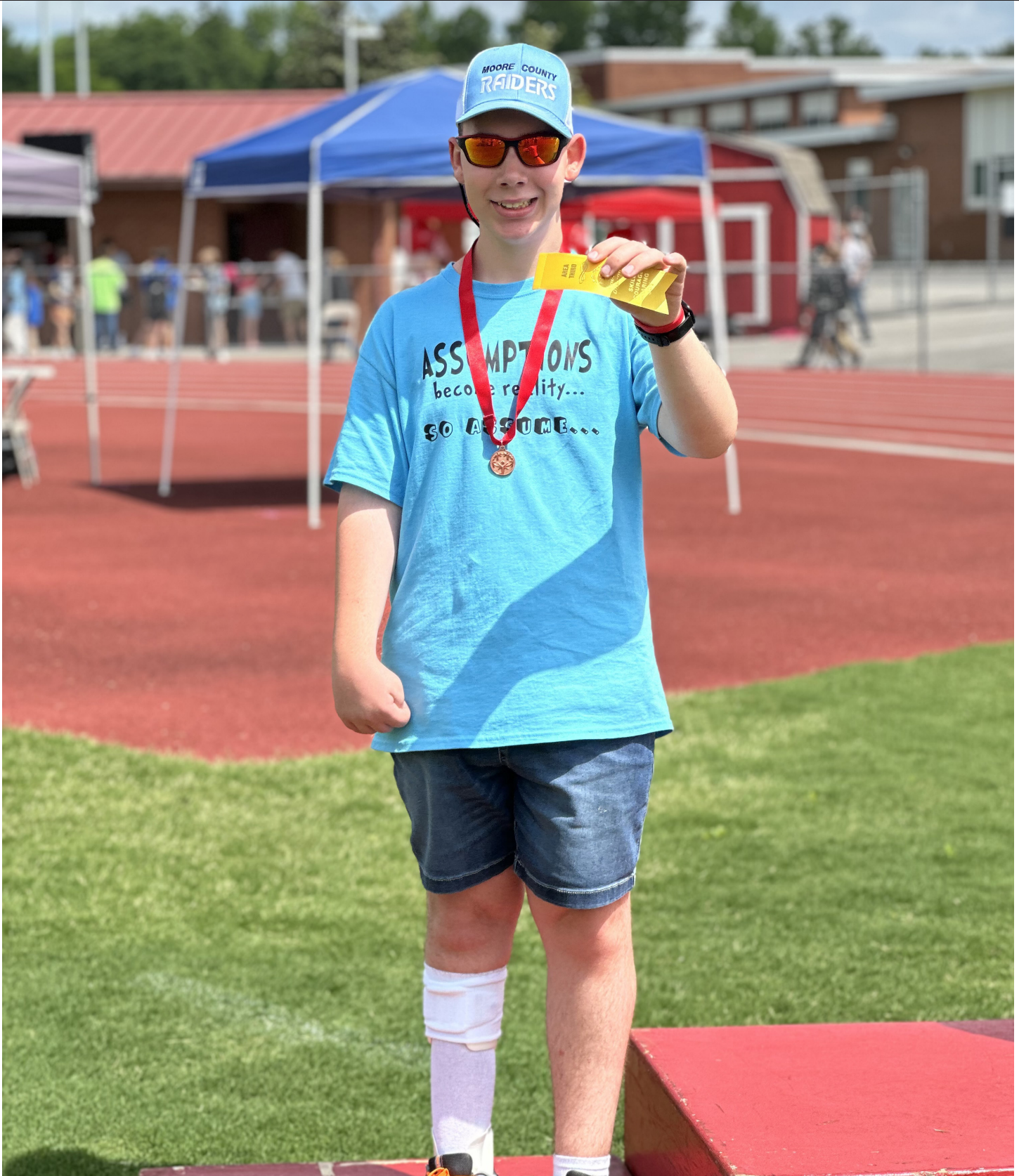
“I was told when he was 3 months old he would only live to be 2 years old — if he was lucky. I was told to make funeral arrangements; it’s easier before they pass than after.”

But not even a medical diagnosis could stop Avery. With the fervent prayers of his friends, church, family, and strangers worldwide, Avery has lived 14 years of his best life. Holly encourages the community never to give up.

“Faith kept me strong, as did my family,” she began. “With faith, all things are possible.”

Thanks to the love and support of his family and community, Avery is able to achieve his goals and positively impact the world around him. If someone you know requires additional support, offer it to them — because you never know how they might impact another’s life.

“Children, young adults, and adults with special needs are people, too, and have the same wants and needs as everyone else. If you have a child who you think may need a little extra help, please reach out to one of the many avenues that are available to you. Your child will thank you.” **GN**





JEREMY WINTERS

***THE CHAMPION
WHO SEES
BEYOND LIMITS***

Jeremy Winters' early life and athletic beginnings

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photos submitted by Jeremy Winters



▲ Kristin, Simon, Emma, Jeremy, and Ava Winters

JEREMY WINTERS' parents instilled in him the belief that there were no limits to what he could achieve. They encouraged him to participate in any sport he wanted, and he gave his all every time he stepped onto the field. Winters' unbreakable spirit and relentless determination became his trademarks, whether it was baseball, Pop Warner football, or basketball. At 8 years old, he was diagnosed with a progressive eye disease, but he refused to let it hinder his love for sports. Despite challenges that might have discouraged others, he maintained a positive attitude, driven by his parents' influence, leaving no room for doubt to seep in.

"I grew up playing sports and enjoyed the team aspect and competition," Winters recalled. "My parents never dwelt on my

vision impairment. They never told me I couldn't do something."

This supportive environment helped him lead with a mindset that anything is possible with determination and hard work.

Winters' path toward athletic success took many twists and turns. In middle school, he dabbled in basketball. In high school, he balanced multiple sports, with football and track becoming his mainstays after a freshman-year ankle injury steered him away from baseball. Track, in particular, became his true passion, with its high-contrast lines, and became a natural fit for Winters. His relentless pursuit of excellence would define his athletic career.

Winters' achievements in track and field at Tullahoma High School are nothing short of remarkable. In 1991, he clinched the state title in the 400-meter



▲ Jeremy and Justin Kuhlers

run with an impressive time of 49.15. He was also an integral part of the state champion 400-meter relay team, clocking in at 42.68. His remarkable journey also includes being a member of the 1990 state champion baseball team and being selected to the All-Midstate football team for special teams in 1991.

He attributes his success to his coach, Winningham, and his fast teammates, who pushed him in practice.

“Coach Winningham prepared us so well,” he said. “We pushed each other in practice, and when it came time for races, it was just about executing what we knew we could do.”

Winters’ determination saw him through numerous challenges, culmi-

nating in a successful collegiate career. This journey was a natural progression of all the work he put in during his high school career.

Starting at Drake University on a track scholarship, he soon realized it wasn’t the right fit. He then transferred to Lipscomb University, only to see their track program dissolve. This led him to Harding University in the fall of 1993, where he finally found his stride. He graduated in 1997 with an undergraduate and master’s degree. While at Harding, he received the 1997 All-American and was a two-time All-American.

“Collegiately, that’s where I had my most success,” he said.

Post-college, Winters’ athletic journey took an unexpected turn. Taking part in a

local triathlon alongside his sister opened up a whole new world of athletics for him. After a couple of challenging races, a race director introduced him to the idea of para triathlons. In 2011, Winters decided to pursue the events more seriously, motivated by a desire to inspire others with visual impairments.

With the support of the Tennessee Association of Blind Athletes, Winters’ hard work ethic paid off, leading him to compete in national and international competitions.

Winters quickly excelled, qualifying for nationals and later representing Team USA in international competitions. Competing in London and the Pan American Games in Mexico were highlights of his career — moments he describes as “indescribable.”



My parents never dwelt on my vision impairment. They never told me I couldn't do something.

JEREMY WINTERS

“Riding a tandem bike in front of Kensington Palace and competing in Hyde Park was a big moment that I enjoyed immensely.”

From 2013 to 2015, he ranked among the top 10 globally and proudly held the United States National Champion title in 2012.

Winters is currently a professor of mathematics at the department of elementary and special education at Middle Tennessee State University. He hopes his story will inspire others with disabilities to pursue their dreams.

Winters was inducted into the Tullahoma Sports Hall of Fame this year. Despite facing progressive eye disease as a young boy, Winters has become an accomplished athlete competing on the world stage. His pursuit of his passions and the support he received are powerful reminders that anything is achievable with the right mindset. His message is this: Find your interest, pursue it, and know you can achieve it. Whether it's on the track, at the university, or in life, he exemplifies what it means to be a true champion. His endless inspiration will continue to impact the athletic world and beyond. His legacy and triumph shine brightly for others to follow. **GN**



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<https://www.schra.us/services/elderly-resources>

The Literacy Council

Supporting literacy initiatives in the community and encouraging reading programs.

(931) 273-8001

Coffee County

Senior Citizens - Tullahoma

Supporting senior citizens by offering social activities, meals, and transportation services.

(931) 455-2504

Facebook: *Coffee County Senior Citizens Center-Tullahoma*

Tullahoma Animal Shelter

Rescuing and caring for animals, promoting pet adoption and responsible pet ownership.

(931) 454-9580

www.tullahoma.petfinder.com

5 Loaves 4 Kids

Providing food on the weekends for children in the elementary and middle schools identified by teachers, school nurses, and cafeteria staff as having critical needs.

5loaves4kids@gmail.com

www.5loaves4kidscharity.com

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Finding hope in the battle with addiction

What is it?

As the first phase in the recovery process, the StepOne ServiceSM is a hospital-based, three-to-five day acute withdrawal management service. Provided at Southern Tennessee Regional Health System, it is for adults who are in the impending or early stage of withdrawal from alcohol and/or opioids.

The service:

- Requires voluntary admission to the hospital.
- Provides round-the-clock medical care by the hospitalist team and nurses at Southern Tennessee Regional Health System.
- Uses protocol-specific medications to reduce the severity of withdrawal symptoms and keep you as comfortable as possible.
- Is provided in partnership with Evergreen Healthcare Partners, LLC.

The commitment

Individuals seeking treatment through the StepOne ServiceSM must be committed to staying in the hospital until they are medically stable. Once discharged from the hospital, they must be motivated to continue addiction treatment by transitioning to a service based in the community.

An individual entering the StepOne ServiceSM will undergo:

- Telephone pre-screening
- In-person assessment
- Admission to the medical unit at Southern Tennessee Regional Health System
- Acute withdrawal management
- Individualized discharge planning
- Post-discharge follow-up

Admission

For information on how to be admitted, call the StepOne ServiceSM coordinator at 931.201.9868.

Most insurance plans are accepted, including Medicaid and Medicare.



To learn more, call
931.201.9868

Find us online at
SouthernTnSewanee.com



1260 University Ave. | Sewanee, TN 37375

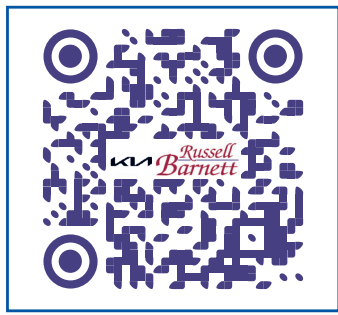
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~ Phillip Fulmer
 (paraphrased)



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