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exchange

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ISSUE 8 2024

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Saturday, September 14 • Gate Admission - \$22 ARMBAND DAY, ALL YOU CAN RIDE

Gate Admission includes - Admission to Fair, Rodeo, and Armband
Rodeo 1:00 P.M. - Closing 7:30 P.M.

Sunday, September 15 • Gate Admission - \$10

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ARMBAND DAY, ALL YOU CAN RIDE FOR \$25 1:00 P.M. - Closing
Quarter Horse Races, Pony Races & Mule Races 1:30 P.M.
Rodeo 6:00 P.M.

Monday, September 16 • Gate Admission - \$10

Pageants • Fayetteville Lumber Stage • Junior Miss • Miss Teen • Fairest of Fair 7:00 P.M.
Non-Sanctioned Truck & Tractor Pull 7:00 P.M.

Tuesday, September 17 • Free Gate Admission & Parking Inside the Fairgrounds Sponsored by Ariens Co.

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Harness Races 7:00 P.M.

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Wednesday, September 18 • Gate Admission - \$10

Harness Races 2:00 P.M.
Battle of the Bands 7:00 P.M.
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Thursday, September 19 • Gate Admission - \$10

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Friday, September 20 • Gate Admission - \$10

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Harness Races 2:00 P.M.
Sanctioned Truck & Tractor Pull 7:00 P.M.

Saturday, September 21 • Gate Admission - \$10

ARMBAND DAY, ALL YOU CAN RIDE (1:00- 5:30 \$20 • 1:00pm- closing \$30)
Harness Races 1:00 P.M.
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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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*Kerri Groce Thomas,
Gina Groce, and Matt Groce*



The Groce family legacy:
**Championing health care
in Lincoln County**

David Groce's dedication to the community's health care
lives on through his children.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

SOME ARE lucky enough to find work they love; others go through the motions of their jobs to pursue outside passions once the workday ends. Few are blessed to have both — a job that fits their skills and interests in a career that enables them to live out their personal calling. David Groce was among the few.

At the time of his death in 2013, he was the chief financial officer of Lincoln County Health System, the perfect place for the

Lincoln County native who wanted the best health care possible for his community.

His daughter, Kerri Groce Thomas, said, “Dad had a love for others that most don’t understand. He really loved his community and fellow man. He had always worked in the health care field, whether in home health or in a hospital. He was thrilled to be able to come to his hometown hospital and serve the community.”

“

We knew that the Foundation was near and dear to him. He worked tirelessly to make it a success, and we didn't want that dedication and work to stop with him.

-Kerri Groce Thomas

Beyond his responsibilities at the hospital, David demonstrated his love and care for those around him by his words and actions. He visited with patients and their families after work and took calls after hours from those needing assistance. His heart never took time off from caring about those around him. It was part of who he was, and it's a trait shared within Groce's immediate and extended family.

"The Groces have always been a part of the hospital," Kerri stated. "Dad's brother, Billy Groce, was CFO of the hospital for many years. His other brother, Phillip Groce, was the lead maintenance technician for many years, and his wife, Phila Groce, was a nurse at the hospital and then Donalson. Dad's mother, Thelma Groce, was a volunteer at the hospital during her years of retirement."

Access to quality health care may not be something we think about until we need it. It may be possible, too, that we don't often



think about the hard work and sacrifice of countless men and women, many behind the scenes, who are part of what we only see as the bigger picture.

David was one of the founding members of the Lincoln Health System Foundation ("the Foundation"). According to its website, the nonprofit organization, formed in 2001, raises funds for and brings awareness to Lincoln Medical Center's (LMC) providers and services that maintain and improve community health. Through cultivating private donations and educating the public, the Foundation contributes to LMC's ongoing success by supporting capital improvement



projects, equipment, and programs benefiting patients and their families.

Kerri and her brother, Matt, continue David's legacy through their work with the Foundation.

"We knew that the Foundation was near and dear to him. He worked tirelessly to make it a success, and we didn't want that dedication and work to stop with him," Kerri said. "After his passing, my brother, Matt Groce, stepped onto the board and served for a number of years. He was the vice chair of the board. Dad's sister, Patricia Bean, also stepped onto the board and continues to serve, and I had the opportunity to step on when

Matt's term was up. We know Dad would be so pleased to see us carrying forward his vision and mission."

Serving on the board provides a behind-the-scenes look into the hospital's needs and related services. As with most career fields today, staffing is a priority. According to Kerri, valuing and empowering employees to take pride and ownership in their roles, coupled with good management, tops the organization's needs list. In addition, she said funding for quality service for all patients is a must.

It's more than reports and budgets — it's a Groce family lifestyle.

"The Groce family is dedicated to continuing to have a presence on the Foundation board, working to raise awareness about the Foundation and raising funds. We also want to keep the David Groce Scholarship funded, educating the next generation of health system employees," Kerri said. "The Foundation has awarded \$70,000 in scholarships since 2007."

With an eye on the future, Matt and Kerri model for their families the dedication and commitment exemplified by their father.

She shared, "Matt and I grew up knowing that the hospital was vital to the community and that there were a lot of caring individuals that worked there. We hope that our children grow up the same [way]. We hope they see the importance of [Lincoln Health] and the Foundation and that they see the good people who work there. When you see all the good that has been and will be done, you can't help but want to be a part of it."

You can be a part of it, too. You can support the work of the Foundation through your gifts to honor someone, in memory of someone, or with a corporate donation. Annual gifts and planned giving are other ways to contribute.

Beth Simms, executive director of the Foundation, said, "We are excited to see our Foundation continue to support our health system. We are proud of the incredible things we have already been able to do and provide, and we pledge to be good stewards and continue the legacy of David Groce. Investments in the HH Lincoln Health Foundation allow access to cutting-edge technology, support innovative programs, and help provide assistance to patients in need."

Sooner or later, we all need to access health care. Thanks to the Groce family and others like them who have a heart of service for our community — it will be here for you. **GN**

For more information on the Lincoln Health System Foundation or to donate, visit <https://hbhlincolnhealth.org/community/foundation/>.

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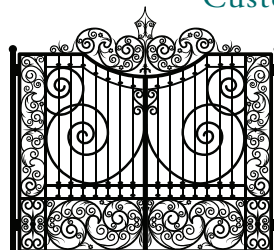
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FAYETTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

2024 Football Schedule

DAY	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Friday	Aug. 23, 2024	Upperman High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 30, 2024	Moore County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 6, 2024	Giles County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 13, 2024	Marion County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 20, 2024	Cannon County High School	TBA
Friday	Sept. 27, 2024	Marshall County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 4, 2024	AWAY @ Sequatchie County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 18, 2024	AWAY @ Nashville Christian School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 25, 2024	AWAY @ Cascade High School	TBA
Thursday	Oct. 31, 2024	AWAY @ Forrest High School	7 p.m.

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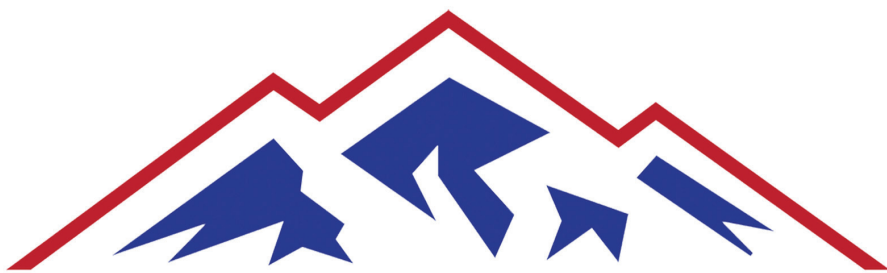
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2024 Football Schedule

DAY	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Friday	Aug. 9, 2024	AWAY @ Zion Christian Academy	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 16, 2024	Trinity Christian Academy	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 23, 2024	Trinity Christian Academy (Cleveland, TN)	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 6, 2024	South Haven	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 13, 2024	CSTHEA	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 20, 2024	Franklin Classical School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 27, 2024	AWAY @ Lancaster Christian	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 4, 2024	AWAY @ CSTHEA (Chattanooga, TN)	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 18, 2024	AWAY @ Freedom (Huntsville, AL)	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 25, 2024	1st Round Varsity Football Playoffs	TBA



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2024 Football Schedule

DAY	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Friday	Aug. 23, 2024	Richland High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Aug. 30, 2024	AWAY @ Davidson Academy	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 6, 2024	AWAY @ Lawrence County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 13, 2024	Spring Hill High School	TBA
Friday	Sept. 20, 2024	AWAY @ Tullahoma High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Sept. 27, 2024	Giles County High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 4, 2024	AWAY @ Franklin County High School	TBA
Friday	Oct. 18, 2024	AWAY @ Cookeville High School	7 p.m.
Friday	Oct. 25, 2024	Shelbyville Central High School	TBA
Friday	Nov. 1, 2024	Columbia Central High School	TBA



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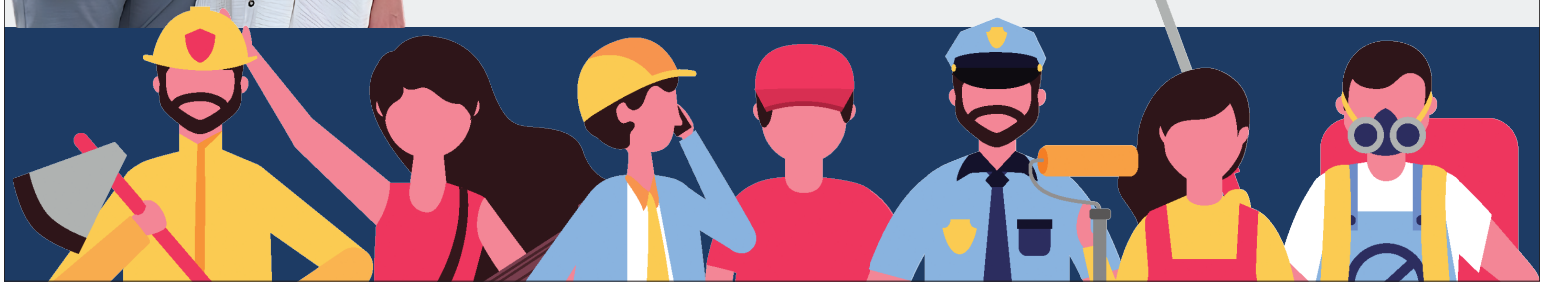
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BEYOND THE STAGE:

INCLUSIVE SPACES AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Autumn Humerickhouse's vision is shaping a community where everyone has a place in the spotlight.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder





AUTUMN
HUMERICKHOUSE

AS THE curtain fell on the Dec. 8, 2017, performance of The Broadway Show Stoppers in Chicago, the young performers buzzed with the excitement of their debut professional performance outside their theatre group. Meeting Music Director Christie Chilies Twillies and working alongside a former American Idol contestant deepened their passion and ignited their creative and artistic spirits. Their local theatre experience led them to this defining moment that left many wanting more.

Their director, Autumn Humerickhouse, an Illinois native, understood. Eighteen years earlier, Humerickhouse, then an 18-year-old high school senior, danced in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The performance, directed by John Jacobson, a world-renowned choreographer, director, and performer, immersed her in the behind-the-scenes work of professional productions.

"That very performance made me realize I didn't just want to act. I wanted to create; I wanted to direct. It was the moment I knew I wanted to do this for the rest of my life," said Humerickhouse."

Her vision extended to working with theatre performers from 2 to 22 years old. The profound reactions of the younger participants in the parade went beyond mere excitement for a nationally seen performance — they underscored a deeper purpose. For Humerickhouse, it was about ensuring that children and young adults of future generations don't miss out on the myriad wonders that theatre has to offer.

It was also about building relationships and inclusive spaces where there's something for everyone despite physical challenges or other issues that might discourage their participation. Despite Humerickhouse's challenged hearing and an autoimmune disorder, she never let anything hold her back from pursuing her dreams. With her Aunt Irene's insistence that she always follow her dreams, because that is where her greatest success lies, and her personal faith in God, she worked for eight years in Chicago and the Chicago Suburbs area, coaching theatre students and directing

performances that enabled them to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

She explained, "It gives children and young adults other ways to communicate with people in the community. It helps include people like me. I'm hard of hearing, so I understand what it feels like to be left out at times. This helps those [who are] not as fortunate have opportunities and a chance to be [included]."

Humerickhouse incorporates American Sign Language into many routines, and her productions include individuals with hearing disabilities, whether on stage as performers or in the audience. These and the other layers of artistic expression teach and stretch the performers in positive ways.

"It's important to me because it teaches the children and young adults leadership, it helps with speech, and, for some people, [builds] motor skills. I believe it teaches them to include others and not be that bully we always hear about. It [empowers] them to feel they have a voice and can be heard," Humerickhouse said. "It will also help them believe in themselves — something theatre did for me throughout the years. I feel these are all great characteristics [that contribute to becoming] a well-rounded adult in the society we live in today."

Her dream work lights the torch carried by new generations devoted to continuing the arts.

"I love knowing I can make a difference in people's lives. Some of my theatre kids are now grown and starting their own families and want to pass their love of theatre down to their children. It makes me feel good that I have helped a lot of these children find their way in life," she said.

After moving to Fayetteville a year ago, she shares her passion locally as director of Make Believe Children's Theatre, a nonprofit organization she founded with her friend, Rebecca Rizzardi. Following a summer workshop, auditions for Sandy's Story are tentatively set for August. Sandy's Story traces Sandy's heartfelt journey to Annie and a forever home. Watch the theatre's Facebook page for announcements regarding show dates this November.

"My long-term goals are to put on performances that entertain a community and bring people together so that we can bring joy into the lives of others and to teach the next generation the art of performing and keep it alive for generations to come," she said. "I thank God for every opportunity to make this group possible."

Humerickhouse always remembers the Macy's parade experience — it's the fuel for the fire that lights the torch.

"My passion comes from people's joy after every performance," she shared. "I want a show that makes people feel like they want to get up and dance with



▲ Autumn Humerickhouse and Rebecca Rizzardi



▲ Abigail and Clara Falletti and Blaze Fowler



these kids and be a part of something so fun and entertaining. The thrill of the excitement after applause is just a feeling you can't describe. It makes me happy to know we did a job well and put smiles on their faces, even if only for a brief moment. Our hard work and dedication make everything in the theatre world worthwhile."

As Humerickhouse's journey in theatre continues, she remains steadfast in her commitment to creating inclusive and enriching spaces for young performers. From her own experiences as a young dancer in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to her transformative work with Make Believe Children's Theatre, her passion for theatre and dedication to

empowering children and young adults, regardless of physical challenges or other obstacles, shines through in every production she directs. Humerickhouse's vision remains clear: to entertain, inspire, and keep the spirit of theatre alive for generations to come. With each curtain call, she lights the torch of creativity and joy, giving a place and a voice to young performers who are more than arts students — they are her family. **GN**

Follow Make Believe Children's Theatre on Facebook for announcements regarding auditions and performances. For more information, contact Autumn Humerickhouse at (931) 625-3840 or email makebelievechildrenstheatre@gmail.com.



**COACH
JONATHAN BROWN**



FALCON
TENNIS






SERVING UP SUCCESS

AT LINCOLN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Coach Jonathan Brown creates champions
and works to inspire lifelong players.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder



THE SHADOWS of the late afternoon sun drape the asphalt courts as the Lincoln County High School (LCHS) tennis team battles its district rival. The rhythmic *thwacks* of fuzzy yellow balls drilling back and forth punctuate the players' grunts as they lean into their swings, interrupted periodically by the *swish* of the net snagging a rogue return.

LCHS's tennis coach, Jonathan Brown, oversees it all with an experienced eye. For Brown, those familiar sights and sounds characterize his life-long passion and dedication to building the local tennis program. It stems from a simple but deeply felt drive.

"I love tennis and want to grow the sport," he said.

TENNIS ROOTS

Brown's love affair with tennis took root at an early age.

"I started playing when I was around 12 years old and went to a free clinic offered by Bobby Parkes," Brown recalled.

He immediately took to the sport, signing up for lessons and constantly looking for others to play with in his hometown of Fayetteville. Brown graduated Magna Cum Laude from Austin Peay State University in 2005 with a bachelor's degree in business administration in accounting, where he was a two-time MVP of the Austin Peay tennis team. He graduated from the Nashville School of Law, obtaining his Tennessee attorney license in 2010.

As a talented young player, Brown met up with a group of gentlemen older than him, including Gerald



**"TENNIS IS MORE LAID
BACK THAN OTHER
SPORTS, BUT IT DOESN'T
MEAN OUR GOALS
AREN'T AS HIGH, AND WE
DON'T EXPECT TO WIN."**

-JONATHAN BROWN

Stafford, John Jeffries, Joseph Hamilton, and Bobby Alder. He began subbing in for matches when one couldn't play, absorbing valuable knowledge and mentorship from the experienced group.

Stafford and Jeffries coached the Lincoln County High School tennis team and helped pave the way for Brown's future coaching career. He spent two years as their assistant before taking over as head coach in 2009, when they stepped down.

FUNDAMENTALS, TECHNICAL SKILLS, AND WINNERS

Despite spring sports like soccer, baseball, and softball overshadowing tennis, Brown continues to find ways to draw athletes to his program. The middle school team's formation a few years ago provided a boost by creating an early feeder system, and his camps and clinics further his goals. He believes these efforts have paid off.

"I feel like the girls were one of the top 10-15 teams in the state this year. And the prior two years, the boys were a top 10 team in the state," he offered proudly. "The girls have only lost two district matches since 2019."

Brown's multi-pronged efforts developed a tennis pipeline in Fayetteville, yielding remarkable high school results. Over his 16-year coaching

tenure at Lincoln County High School and five years simultaneously at Fayetteville City High School, Brown has had individuals win two state championships and finished as runners-up three times. From 2017 to now, the girls, boys, or both have won the team district championship. His players have also achieved impressive results, producing 28 singles and doubles champion titles. It's no wonder Brown is a seven-time coach of the year.

"The ultimate goal is to continue to show kids that tennis is fun, and you can play a nontraditional sport from a small town and be successful," Brown stated. "We have fun, but we also win championships. Hard work pays off."

A key factor has been the support of assistant coach Dietmar Berngruber, who has been helping him for more than a decade.

"I couldn't do it without his help or the help of my wife, Laura, who is also a good tennis player," Brown explained.

Another essential part of Brown's approach is an emphasis on practice.

"We practice more than most teams in our district," he said. "You can tell the kids that want to get better. It's like the old saying goes — 'practice makes perfect.'"

Drawing from his own experiences on the court, Brown aims to use tennis to develop character and perspective that extend far beyond the game itself. The joy remains in simply sharing his passion and watching kids develop life lessons along with their skills.

"Tennis is more laid back than other sports, but it doesn't mean our goals aren't as high, and we don't expect to win," he pointed out.

LOOKING AHEAD

Brown is equally passionate about investing in the school's tennis facilities. His goals are paying off the booster club's loan obtained for recent court resurfacing and adding lights to extend the use of the courts.

He said, "With no other courts playable [at this time] in town, the high school is all we have, so I would love some



▲ Haley, Jonathan, and Melly Brown

additional help from the community to make this a reality."

The family that plays together stays together. The Browns' daughters, Haley, 10, and Melly, 8, have grown up around the program.

"Tennis is a family affair in my family," Brown said. He hopes his children

will one day experience being part of a state championship team.

The future of tennis in Lincoln County is bright. Brown's sustained devotion cultivates a thriving tennis culture that will continue impacting generations of Fayetteville youth. **GN**





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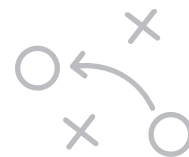
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Tailgate like a **CHAMPION**

Kick off the season with these game day recipes.

WHEN THE stadium lights blaze and the roar of the crowd echoes, true fans know the game-day experience begins in the parking lot. Celebrate your team's spirit with these tailgating recipes, which will fuel your revelry from kickoff to the final whistle.

From handheld classics to shareable spreads, these dishes pack bold flavors and endless energy — the perfect sustenance for cheering your champions to victory. Fire up the grill and get ready to tailgate in championship style! **GN**

Hot 'N' Tangy Wings

Submitted by Dennis Gardner

3 1/2 lbs. chicken wings

1 c. barbecue sauce

1/2 c. hot sauce

1/2 c. honey

1 t. brown sugar

1 t. dry mustard

Clean and dry chicken wings. Cut and discard wing tips. Cut the wings at their joints to make two separate pieces. Place chicken pieces in broiler for 8-10 minutes until chicken is browned, flipping pieces once. Place chicken in a slow cooker. In a small mixing bowl, combine barbecue sauce, hot sauce, honey, brown sugar, and mustard. Pour over wings. Cover and cook on low for 4 1/2-5 hours or on high for 2-2 1/2 hours.



Submit your recipes to be included in Good News Magazine and the Exchange Cookbook: www.southernaprons.com



Potato Salad

Submitted by Debbie Henderson

1 bag potatoes, 5 lb., cooked, peeled, and diced
6 dill pickles, chopped
6 hard boiled eggs, chopped
salt, to taste
pepper, to taste
5 ribs of celery, chopped
1/2 onion, chopped
1 can sliced black olives, drained
mayonnaise, to coat mixture
mustard, to color

Mix cooked potatoes, pickles, eggs, salt, pepper, celery, onion, and olives in large bowl. Add enough mayonnaise to coat mixture. Add just enough mustard to color salad. Chill salad for at least 2 hours.



Calico Cheese Dip

Submitted by Nancy Johnston

4 c. Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
4 oz. can green chilies, chopped
2 ¼ oz. can sliced, ripe olives, drained
½ c. minced, fresh parsley
4 green onions, sliced
3 med. tomatoes, diced and seeded
1 pkg. Italian salad dressing mix
tortilla chips

In a mixing bowl, combine the cheese, chilies, olives, onions, tomatoes, and parsley. Prepare salad dressing mix according to package directions. Pour over cheese mixture and mix well. Serve with tortilla chips.



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LOUIS THOMPSON

**HARVESTING
GREATNESS
ON THE
GRIDIRON**

Louis Thompson playing for Alabama Crimson Tide in 1966.



A farmer's son cultivated championship habits in the lives of his players.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder and submitted by Louis Thompson

AS THE late summer sun pressed down on the field, the clunk of helmets and the shrill blows from the coach's whistle pushed against the hovering humidity. Tackle dummies fell back under the weight of grunting young athletes eager to test their abilities in the coming season. The first days of practice and a clean slate motivated the new and returning players.

It was far removed from the softball field and outdoor basketball court of Louis Thompson's grade school. No stranger to hard work, the son of a farmer knew about seasons. Planting, tending, and harvesting was one thing, but football was another story — one he'd never experienced. The first practice left him reeling, questioning his decision to play.

"Just give it a chance," urged coach Edd Cantrell, head football coach at Lebanon High School, sensing the uncertainty in his first-time freshman player.

Those five little words held the power to mold a hall of fame high school coach.

"I thought about quitting big-time the first day I ever practiced football. I had no clue. I was 14 years old and had never put on a shoulder pad, headgear, or anything else, but I made it through the first day," said Thompson. "Had he not said something to me, I might not have gone back the next day. I can't tell you how many days I think about that first day of football and where I'd be right now."

Thompson noticed something else in those early practices that framed his coaching philosophy — Hester Gibbs, the

lineman coach, treated everyone the same.

"Coach Gibbs always encouraged me to do the best I could every day," Thompson recalled. "It didn't matter what it was — every day, he tried to make me better in some aspect of the game. And I tried to remember that when I started coaching."

It sounds counterintuitive to a winning game plan, yet countless men live with purpose and pride today because of their time with Thompson, who played at the University of Alabama for coach Bear Bryant.

He stated, "I always tried to treat everybody the same; it didn't matter who they were. I saw it my whole high school career, and I saw it with Coach Bryant. He didn't care if it was the quarterback or the last team running back — he tried to treat everybody the same."



Coach Gibbs always encouraged me to do the best I could every day. It didn't matter what it was — every day, he tried to make me better in some aspect of the game.

LOUIS THOMPSON

Like his coaches, Thompson encouraged his players to set goals and strive for them, one at a time. It's what builds players, teams, and championships. But more importantly, it builds character that remains long after the field lights dim.

"You've got to have a burning desire to reach that goal, whatever it is. And I think if you reach enough of them, listen to your coaches and your teammates and sell out, and you're all in for it, and you get enough young men, or women, whatever sport it is, to buy into that, then you can become a champion," he said.

He shared a perfect example of a sold-out commitment.

In 1982, when Thompson took over the struggling football program in Unicoi County, he encountered a freshman in the weight room who could barely lift the 45-pound bar during max-out testing. But, from that moment, the player committed himself fully. Through tremendous work ethic in the weight room and on the

field, he went from that initial failure to eventually benching an impressive 330 pounds. He received a scholarship to play at East Tennessee State University, exemplifying how players who initially lacked developed talent, by buying into the process, transformed into champions who earned opportunities through their determination.

Thompson points to quarterback Kelly Holcomb as another champion example. Despite being undersized, Holcomb's leadership and burning desire drove the Lincoln County High School team to a state championship under Thompson's leadership.

"Kelly was a great leader and one of the main reasons that we did win the state," Thompson recalled.

Holcomb took that championship mentality and became Middle Tennessee State's all-time leading passer before going pro as an NFL quarterback.

"Kelly is a prime example of what it takes to be a champion," said Thompson. "He had that burning desire to excel and became a starter who ended up playing 13 years in the NFL."

Holcomb's journey from undersized high school star to professional football player personifies the success stories that defined Thompson's program — challenging players equally, regardless of size or perceived talent, to develop the physical and mental fortitude required to reach their full potential.

Thompson is quick to acknowledge he didn't accomplish it all alone. It was possible, he said, thanks to the patient support of his wife and children, the hard work of great assistant coaches, and the encouragement of a loyal fanbase.

Over his 24 years leading the Falcons, Thompson embodied the pursuit of consistent improvement and character development, which was

his program's central force. Under his guidance, the team captured two state titles and made 20 playoff appearances. This profound legacy earned him a place in the TSSAA Hall of Fame and the hearts of the countless players whose lives he shaped.

For Thompson, the ultimate measure of success extended far beyond wins and championships. It was forging young men of character who maximized their potential through an unwavering commitment to his principles of hard work, discipline, and an inextinguishable "burning desire."

It's where true champions were made. **GN**

"If you believe in yourself and have dedication and pride and never quit, you'll be a winner. The price of victory is high, but so are the rewards."

– Bear Bryant





MIA BROWN

**MIA BROWN:
PITCHING
WITH
PERSPECTIVE**

The University of Memphis recruit balances softball with what truly matters.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder

THE UPROAR surrounding the field becomes a distant murmur as Mia Brown digs her cleats into the pitcher's plate. The mound is her sanctuary, a judgment-free zone where she can simply be herself. Her laser focus narrows to the catcher's signals, the familiar routine quieting her mind despite the game's intensity. This is Brown's happy place.

"I love the sport — I love absolutely everything about it. One of the reasons softball has always been such a big part of my life is because I've always felt like I could be myself. No matter who I was around on the softball field, all I had to do was satisfy myself," Brown reflected.

But the passion driving her success on the field was casting longer shadows over her life. With each blistering pitch, she poured more of herself into the game, slowly blurring the lines between athlete and person, chasing an identity defined by statistics and scoreboards.

When other 3-year-olds played under the bleachers, Brown practiced alongside her older sister, Ella, coached by their father, Todd. But when Ella was seriously injured in an accident and no longer able to play, Mia took on responsibilities

beyond her age. With every *chink* of the bright, neon ball against the Louisville Slugger and its repeated *whump* against the leather glove, her love for the game grew more than ever, nurturing the quiet confidence she exuded on the field.

Fueled by a determination to improve, she invested countless additional hours of independent practice.

Her dad, Todd, said, "Mia has had a grit about her since she was 3. She would practice for hours on end — she would not be outdone. She has a competitive edge about her that is relentless."

Now, she gives back to the sport, mentoring young players. Witnessing their growth fills Mia with pride, knowing how hard they worked. Even more rewarding is seeing players return lesson after lesson, having mastered what they previously struggled with through dedicated practice. She truly believes in them and hopes they sense she's their biggest fan.

"I really try to push the confidence part," Mia shared. "I tell them to step in the box and tell themselves, 'I'm the best player out here.' Once they believe it, you can just see a change in their



I tell them to step in the box and tell themselves, 'I'm the best player out here.' Once they believe it, you can just see a change in their demeanor.

MIA BROWN

demeanor. They're determined to hit the ball right back at me because they know they're prepared."

She believes equally in her teammates and encourages them, knowing the game's outcome is a mutual effort.

Mia said, "I've really tried to push 'do your best.' We'll all do our best, and it'll all work out in the end."

Her strength is undeniable, both on and off the field.

"Mia is our fighter — she's tough, not just physically, but mentally as well," her mother, Sara, said in a Facebook post.

"Anyone who knows her — really knows her — can attest to this. She's probably the most mentally strong person I've ever met. Over the years, Mia has been her sisters' protector, her dad's substitute boy, a leader on the field for her teammates, and held responsible for so many things

that sometimes I wonder how she doesn't crumble under the weight of it."

Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable sometimes exposes our greatest strengths. Years of Mia measuring her days and her value by statistics and scoreboards stole her joy, coming between her and time with the people she held dear.

Mia shared, "Last softball season, I went through a really tough mental health crisis, and it made me realize how important Christ was in my life. I was letting the outcome of my softball games — that little ball — define me as a person so much that I couldn't enjoy time with my family or my friends. I didn't feel like I could talk to Christ. I came to the realization that, at the end of the day, I'm not going to have that yellow ball. Softball is going to end one day, but I'll always have my relationship with Christ and my family and friends. I came

to the realization that my relationship with Christ meant more than the game."

Time on the mound produced a bond with catcher Abby Flynt. The two share an unspoken connection forged through countless games, practices, and their shared faith.

"We've really grown together this season. She knows me on the mound, probably better than I know myself. She knows what pitches I can throw, when I can throw them, and what to call. She knows if I'm struggling what pitches I can throw to come back from where I'm at," Mia said. "She knows me better than I know myself, honestly. She's one of my best friends. And she's also helped me grow closer to God. We pray before every game. I think she's played a huge role in my growth in Christ this past year, and I'm just really thankful for her."

Friends, family, and faith on and off the field fuel her life now. Her new perspective goes with her as the next season of her life and softball career opens at the University of Memphis.

Mia said, "I've always loved kids. When I get out of college, I want to be a pediatric [intensive care unit] nurse."

Todd said, "As her dad, I'm in awe of the woman she's become, and words can't express the pride I carry watching her with young kids and older adults. She will make a great nurse, wife, and mama one day — or whatever she sets her mind to do."

Now, she'll take the mound at the University of Memphis with clarity. Although the mound remains her sanctuary, she has found balance. Her identity is no longer solely defined by the game. Centered by her faith and surrounded by the unwavering support of family and friends, Mia can simply be herself. And when she plays her last game, she's ready to pour her passion into helping others on a new field. The future lies wide open before her. **GN**





T'ESSENCE PHELPS

**REBOUNDING
FOR SUCCESS**

T'Essence Phelps is a driving force with a passion for uplifting her hometown youth.

By Tina Neeley // Photography by Brooke Snyder



“S **MALL TOWN**, big dreams” – four little words and a familiar cliché but one carrying a lot on its wings. For some, it represents a hope to see, learn, or experience more, not to escape something small and mundane. The idea of “more” varies for each person, but the desire for it can be life-changing, both individually and for those impacted by it in the future. While some people do leave and never return, many others follow their hearts back home, bringing a positive influence and focus with them. T'Essence Phelps is one of them.

Phelps' commitment to uplifting the youth of her hometown compels her.

Breaking records, encouraging youth

Challenges paved Phelps' path, but she consistently defies expectations. As a standout player at Kentucky Wesleyan College, she

etched her name in the program's record books, ranking fifth in total rebounds with 591 and eighth in rebounding average with 6.7 per game. Her accomplishments on and off the court at Kentucky Wesleyan College were recognized when she was inducted into the prestigious Oak and Ivy Honor Society in 2014, awarded to those demonstrating spiritual leadership, intellectual ability, and strength of character.

Upon returning to her hometown of Fayetteville after her stellar collegiate basketball career, Phelps embraced the opportunity to build up the Fayetteville Middle School girls basketball program. Taking over as head coach in April 2022, she swiftly instilled a culture of discipline, hard work, and a winning mindset. Within one season, Phelps' guidance and leadership transformed the team, equipping the players with the structure, direction, and mental fortitude needed to reach new heights.



Phelps appreciated her assistant's contribution to the team's success. "Assistant coach Khaila King was a great addition to our program. We have very similar backgrounds with the same coaches in high school, and some of our AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] coaches were the same. The girls got to see us work together as a team, [which] allowed them to work together as a team. I'm glad the girls got to encounter two women coming together to really succeed."

Phelps' unwavering belief in hard work, discipline, and equal opportunity resonated deeply throughout the team. She instilled a culture where principles took precedence over individual stats or accolades. Her players bought into it, coming together as a unified force and leaving egos at the door.

"We won the first area championship that the girls' season has ever had," Phelps said. "I believe in hard work because I know what hard work got me. I know my

coach put me in a position to win, and I took advantage of it."

A relentless pursuit

Phelps' relentless pursuit of improving youth opportunities extends beyond the basketball court. In addition to coaching, she worked closely with students on their post-graduation goals as they explored various pathways, whether it was college, military service, or entrepreneurship.

Her entrepreneurial roots trace back to living in Houston following college graduation, where she operated her personal fitness training business, Fit To The T. This allowed her to share her passion for healthy living with a broader clientele while developing valuable entrepreneurial skills she could bring back to inspire her hometown community. Today, she continues her mental and physical fitness training on Instagram at @misstphelps. Phelps has an undergrad-

uate degree in psychology and a master's in psychology with a sports specialization.

She said, "I help others heal themselves. I help people see their full potential. My purpose is to help others, and before that, [it was] to help myself. Helping others see their full potential — that you can do it regardless of where you come from. And sometimes you might not have that family support, but you can create it with those around you and whoever believes in you."

Phelps' ambitions extend far beyond the basketball court. She recognized the need for more resources and opportunities in her hometown community of Fayetteville, so she joined the Army National Guard. While her exact role is still to be determined through further testing and evaluation, Phelps views this as a pivotal next step in her journey to create positive change.

"I know with my brain, I can use the resources to help the kids in the future. And I



I want to show that just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't do all these things and still be a champion.

T'ESSENCE PHELPS

plan on having a future family. All my family's from here, and my mom was born here," Phelps shared. "Sometimes you gotta go back to the plan and rebound and get back to it. I want to be able to be that person who can bring the resources to Fayetteville and help grow the community."

Her focus on continuous personal and professional growth demonstrates her dedication to the community, especially the youth she is so passionate about impacting.

A legacy of empowerment

Phelps' driving force is creating opportunities that uplift her community — especially the youth who have faced similar barriers and lack of resources that she overcame. Her drive to empower the next generation from all backgrounds stems from a deeply personal understanding of their challenges.

"I want to show that just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't do all these things and still be a champion," she declared.

Phelps' actions leave a lasting positive influence on those mentored, fueled by an authentic desire to provide the guidance, support, and pathways to success that were not always available to her. As she transitions to this new phase with the National Guard, that passion for opening doors and expanding possibilities for Fayetteville's youth will undoubtedly propel her forward. It's a big dream for her small town, and she's determined to bring it home. **GN**

Follow @misstphelps on Instagram for more information on Fit to the T personal training.



Fayetteville's First Saturday - July 6



Photography by Brooke Snyder

Farmers, artisans, and locals gathered on the square for Fayetteville's First Saturday. The community came together to support local businesses and mingle with friends, family, and neighbors. The event brings local produce, food trucks, handcrafted goods, and live entertainment to the historic downtown area on the first Saturday of each month from April to October.



1. Samantha Spray and Olivia Beard 2. Alanna Enoch, Christin Walker, and Brandy Bradley
3. Alayah Emmons, Juanita Harper, TJ Emmons, Arsenio Norris, Cashton McDonald, Jennifer Harper and Arreion McDonald
4. Amy Harwell and John Ross Taylor 5. Katelyn and Cody Allen 6. Susan Glass and Hailey Newcomb



7. Aralyn Mitchell 8. Savanna Patterson 9. Gerrica Moran
10. Kristen, Eva, and Charlotte Howard with Fallon Melchior 11. Whitney Plunkett

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Provides mental, physical, educational, and recreational activities for individuals 55 years and older.

(931) 433-7271
Facebook: Fayetteville Lincoln County Senior Center

Kings Mountain Messenger Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution

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kingsmountainmessenger@tndar.org
www.tndar.org/~kingsmountain

Hands of Mercy Outreach Center

Provides food and utility assistance as a faith-based outreach center.

(931) 433-4263
<https://handsofmercycenter.com>

Southern Alliance Spay Neuter Clinic

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(931) 433-0120

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(931) 625-9128
www.patchesplacecatrescue.org

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(931) 433-7442

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Good Samaritan Association

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(931) 433-0260

Motlow College Foundation

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(931) 393-1543

www.motlow.edu/give/foundation.html

The Fayetteville-Lincoln County Museum and Civic Center

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(931) 297-2450

www.flcmuseum.org

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