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Reliable electricity, outstanding customer service the foundation of new REB general manager's position

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Long before he was hired as Russellville Electric Board's new general manager, Derrick Moore knew a lot about his prospective employer.

Prior to his interview, Moore did his research. Not only did he visit REB's two substations and review the utility's infrastructure, he and his wife Chelsea made multiple trips to Russellville, visiting local restaurants and stores as they met and talked with residents.

"I believe strongly for anyone looking to make a move and take a position at this level to go and do their research," Moore told the FFP last

week. "My wife and I came to this community, talked with local residents and listened to what they had to say. Before my interview, I didn't know anyone here, on the board or any employees. But we found everyone to be amazing, displaying southern hospitality at its best.

"I also drove around the city looking at the substations and the electric system. Russellville is a little smaller than Decatur, but everything lined up with my personal interests and career aspirations I was looking for," he added.

Fortunately for Moore, his experience, professionalism and knowledge made quite an impression on the Russellville Electric Board as well.

See 'REB,' Page 9

'Too much too fast' a recipe for trouble in new year's fitness programs

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

In the 22 years since she and her husband Randy opened Freemon Fitness in Russellville, Evonne Freemon has seen hundreds of new members start a New Year's fitness regimen.

And there have been many success stories, and, unfortunately, some failures after a few weeks or months.

The key, Freemon explains, is not overdoing it.

"Don't overdo it when starting a new fitness program. Otherwise, you won't keep coming back and you won't want to commit," Freemon said. "You don't want to get so sore you lose it. Ease into a new fitness program."

Freemon's Fitness is located at 24465 Highway 24 West, adjacent to Randy's business, Freemon Marine. According to

See 'FREEMON,' Page 4



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Managing your fearful and obsessive thoughts

Stan Popovich
For the Franklin Free Press

There are times that we encounter negative thoughts that can be overwhelming.

For some people, the more they try to get rid of their thoughts, the stronger they become.

As a result, here is a brief list of techniques that a person can use to help manage their obsessive thinking.

1. Do not focus on your fearful thinking: The first thing a person must do is not to dwell on the fear

provoking thought when it comes. The more a person tries to reason out on the fear behind the thought, the stronger it becomes. The next time you encounter a negative situation, get into the practice of not dwelling on it.

2. Think of a red stop sign: At times, a person might encounter a fearful thought that may be difficult to manage. When this happens, visualize a red stop sign which can serve as a reminder to think about something else. Regardless of how scary your negative thinking may be, do not dwell on it.

3. Its only fear: The difference between an obsessive thought and a regular one is that an obsessive thought is based on fear. With this in mind, try to find the source of the fear behind your negative thinking and then find ways to get rid of your worries.

4. Your thoughts are exaggerated: Sometimes, a person may encounter a lot of scary thoughts coming at them all at once. Instead of getting upset, remember that your negative thinking is exaggerated with worry. Ignore the fear behind these obsessive thoughts, regardless how the strong the fear may be.

5. Challenge your negative thinking with positive statements and realistic thinking: When encountering thoughts that make you fearful or depressed, challenge them by asking yourself questions that will maintain objectivity and common sense. Focus on the reality of your situation and not on your negative thinking.

6. Carry a small notebook of positive statements with you: A person should keep a small notebook of positive statements that makes them feel good. Whenever they come across a positive and uplifting verse that makes them happy, write it down in a small notebook. A person can then carry this notebook around in their pocket and whenever they feel anxious, they can read their notebook.

7. Take it one day at a time: Instead of worrying about how you will get through the rest of the week or month, try to focus on today. Each day can provide us with different opportunities to learn new things and that includes learning how to deal with your situation. In addition, you will not feel overwhelmed with everything if you focus on one thing at a time.

8. Get help: Take advantage of the help that is available around you. If possible, talk to a professional who can help you manage your fears and anxieties. They will be able to provide you with additional advice and insights on how to deal with your current problem. By talking to a professional, a person will be helping themselves in the long run because they will become better able to deal with their problems in the future.

BIOGRAPHY

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

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'FREEMON,' From Page 1

www.thesummitfit.com, the top five reasons Americans don't stick with an exercise program are: lack of time, unrealistic expectations, motivation, fear of pain and poor exercise environment.

Freemon's members enjoy 24-hour access to the gym and tanning facilities, so that alleviates any concerns about lack of time to exercise. You can come when it's convenient, night or day.

And Freemon's clean, friendly environment allows members to work out where you don't have to worry about exercising in a crowded or intimidating facility.

Evonne helps new members design a workout schedule for those starting a fitness program for the first time. She has a beginner's schedule for a three-per-week workout plan. All machines are numbered, so it makes it easy for a beginner to navigate through the gym and find the right machines.

"We have a lot of members who've never really worked out so this helps them get started and they can adjust to do something later," Freemon said. "We also have a personal trainer available for hire but this schedule is for those who don't want to hire someone."

Each year, Freemon regularly invests in new amenities or exercise machines, including three ellipticals and a recumbent bike last year.

Memberships include free tanning, private showers, staffed hours, free WiFi, cardio with individual TVs, along with 24-hour key access and a Fitness on Demand room.

It's all there for someone to be successful in a new exercise program, and veteran fitness gurus will enjoy the clean, family-friendly environment at Freemon's.

Regardless of your fitness level, Freemon's Fitness offers a relaxed, non-judgmental environment.

"Some women worry about what if they do something wrong or aren't able to do too much, but everyone does their own thing here. If you need a hand, most of our members are glad to help you, but nobody's watching to see how much of a workout you're doing,"

Freemon said.

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Freemon keeps office hours on Monday and Friday until 6 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday until 7 p.m.

You can call Freemon's at 256-331-9003 for more information about memberships.

Rickey Smith, owner of Personal Touch Fitness in Russellville, works with clients who want a professional trainer to help them begin and maintain a fitness program. You can learn more by calling Smith at 256-668-2844.

Florence Indian Mound Museum presenting free program on Chickasaw weapons and tools

Submitted

Bill Brekeen, cultural interpreter for the Chickasaw Nation, Heritage Preservation division, will make a presentation about Chickasaw weapons and tools on Sunday, January 26th, at 1p.m., at the Florence Indian Mound Museum.

Brekeen will display and discuss weapons and tools for hunting, warfare, and farming. He will talk about the "Waste not, want not" theory, and respect for the natural world and for life. When harvesting animals, Chickasaws took great care to use as much as possible.

Brekeen serves as a cultural interpreter for the Chickasaw Nation, Heritage Preservation Division, in the historic Chickasaw Homeland. Bill began employment with the Chickasaw Nation as a Cultural Interpreter in March 2015 after retiring with The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks after a 30-plus year career.

His duties include providing Homeland tours to tribal officials, employees, Chickasaw citizens, and the public. Bill conducts research for general knowledge, programs, and publications, assists with the development and facilitation of educational programs for all age groups, and provides presentations at local agencies, organizations, schools, and community outreach events.

Bill enjoys anything outdoor-related and is passionate about sharing the rich and proud culture and history of the Chickasaw people.

This program is free and is sponsored by the City of Florence Department of Arts and Museums and the Alabama Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association.

The Florence Indian Mound Museum is located at 1028 S. Court St., Florence, and is open Tuesday - Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Call 256-760-6427 for more information.

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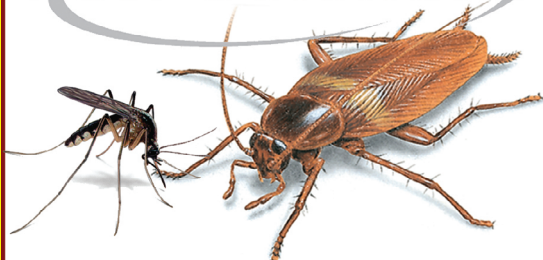
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 **T**he Foster Grandparent Program is seeking volunteers ages 55 and older to help tutor and mentor children in day care, head start and schools. Volunteers will receive a tax-free stipend and travel reimbursement. We have openings for several schools for the coming school year. Please call 256-332-6800 for an application.

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Winter preparedness a massive undertaking for TVA ahead of winter weather

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As Tennessee Valley Authority Colbert Combustion Turbine Plant Manager Mark Rutland escorted a group of media around the plant Tuesday afternoon, the outside temperature steadily sank below 30 degrees, with a wind chill factor making it feel like 25.



COURTESY PHOTO

The three new combustion turbines tower above the Colbert Combustion Turbine Plant. The three new ones regularly in use.

Ahead of a weekend with seven or more inches of snow expected, along with temperatures in the low 20s, Rutland displayed a quiet confidence when asked whether his facility was ready to withstand some extreme winter weather.

And his answer was an unwavering yes.

TVA has invested approximately \$430 million in the current fiscal year to strengthen its system and improve reliability at its natural gas, coal and hydro power plants in advance of extreme winter temperatures.

TVA's winter preparedness includes securing enclosures around exposed equipment, insulating exposed pipes, using heat trace technology to alert technicians to potential issues and training personnel to be better prepared for extreme weather events.

With three combustion turbines that became operational in 2023, the Colbert Combustion Turbine Plant adds approximately 750 megawatts of electricity to TVA's capability. And with more than \$500 million invested in the Colbert project, protecting these new units from extreme weather will always be a priority.

It was 2013 when TVA, in response to a federal court order, announced its intentions to transition out of coal-fired power generation and move toward natural gas-generated electricity at its Colbert location.

The combustion turbines work by drawing in air, compressing it, mixing it with natural gas and igniting it. That pressurized stream triggers the turbine blades to spin and they're connected to a generator to produce electricity.

The Colbert Combustion Turbine Plant also has eight combustion turbines constructed in 1972, with

Preparations for winter readiness at the Colbert plant began in March, Rutland said.

"We look at the challenges we faced the previous year with our staff and what lessons we learned from those challenges," Rutland said.

He explained that TVA has 'milestones' for each site where the estimated most extreme temperatures are established with the goal of being prepared to meet electricity demands even at those milestone temperatures. For the Colbert plant, it's designed to operate from a range of -5 degrees below zero to 110 degrees for a 24-hour period.

The Colbert plant is a peaking site, meaning it doesn't generate electricity through the three turbines around the clock. Instead, it's set up to become operational within 17 minutes and when demand necessitates additional electricity production, the turbines respond as needed.

Last weekend, Rutland said peak usage across the Tennessee Valley was expected to exceed 30,000 megawatts, which would trigger peaking sites like Colbert to start production.

The Tennessee Valley's all-time peak power demand came almost one year ago, when it hit 34,577 megawatts at 8 a.m., January 17, 2024, during Winter Storm Heather.

The 750 megawatt capability at Colbert Combustion Turbine Plant is sufficient to power more than 400,000 homes.

The Colbert plant has 15 employees. There are eight combustion turbine technicians, one machinist and three electricians on staff, Rutland said.

"We live here just like you do. Our families live in this community. Our kids go to school here and when these guys come to work every day, they're invested because they're part of the community as well," Rutland said.

"We don't want anything interrupting service to our hospitals or our schools. We need to provide that power when we're needed the most," he added.



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“He is just what we were looking for and hoped we would find during the first round of applications,” REB Board Chairman Chad Wells said. “He’s in a position as second in command (at Decatur Utilities) and he just couldn’t move up because he was hired at the same time the current general manager was. He was the top pick of everyone on the board.”

Moore began his new job December 16th. It was the fulfillment of a professional goal he set for himself many years ago.

“I was hired at Decatur Utilities as an apprentice lineman. I went into that job with the goal of one day being a general manager of a utility company,” Moore said. “Decatur did everything they could to put me in school, train me and get me ready to be in this position.”

The only snag, though, was Moore topped out as second in command at Decatur Utilities, because there was a well-qualified general manager in place who was hired the same time as Moore. And Decatur Utilities is set up where one general manager runs all four departments.

After his four-year apprenticeship, Moore was hired as a lineman, then soon advanced to leadership positions as lead lineman, general foreman and general supervisor over all Decatur Utilities construction crews.

When the Russellville Electric Board position came available, Moore saw an opportunity and applied.

“I saw a position that presented an exciting opportunity to further advance my skills, manage a team and ensure efficient service delivery to our customers, which is the goal,” Moore said. “I understand the responsibility of the general manager position. Not only are you responsible for the day-to-day operations of the business, you make sure your staff functions to the best of their abilities, make sure our customers are looked after with the highest standards of customer service and care, along with ways to grow in the community and be an active part of that community while serving them the highest level we can give them along with the best customer service we can provide.”

Those should be inspirational words to REB ratepayers, many of whom had issues with prior management. Putting customer service first, delivering a safe, reliable product and leading and encouraging REB employees are the foundations of Moore’s new position.

He plans to look into bringing the Tennessee Valley Authority’s ‘Energy Right’ program to Russellville, something the prior general manager chose not to do. The program offers residential and business incentives for energy upgrades, but the program is optional for local power companies to participate in.

“It’s one thing I’d like to put in place. Anything we can give our customers that can help them if we offer it or TVA offers it, I’m more than willing to put that out there for our customers,” Moore said.

When it comes to his staff, Moore is a general manager who can relate to each employee.

“I’ve been there. I was raised up doing the same thing they’re doing. I went to school, got promoted, got into the management part of it and I think that will help me have the respect of those guys, knowing I started from the bottom and worked my way up through the system to get where I’m at,” Moore said.

“That experience will allow me to not only respect them but know the sacrifices they make and the dangers of their jobs. And that helps me understand where they’re coming from as opposed to someone who hasn’t come through from the bottom,” he added.

Moore earned an Associate’s Degree in Power Technology and has a Bachelors Degree in Energy Management. He and Chelsea have four children, Gage, Triston, Braxton and Oakley. Moore grew up in Guntersville and graduated from Douglas High School in 2000.

The Russellville Electric Board now has a general manager who not only climbed up the ranks of a utility, he also climbed up utility poles as a lineman for many years.

A condition of the GM’s job was that he or she live in the City of Russellville, and the Moore family is in the process of working on that already, spending afternoons and weekends looking for housing, whether that be a short term rental or a house to purchase. Needless to say, it’s been a busy six weeks for Moore and his family.

“I believe I have my feet on the ground. There’s still a lot to take in with this position. Decatur had almost 30,000 customers and we have about 5,100. It’s different but I’ve been welcomed not only by our employees and the board, but the whole community. And that’s made the transition so much smoother coming here. I’m enjoying this and blessed to have been given this opportunity,” Moore said.

Less than four weeks into his new position, Moore and his department dealt with a severe winter weather event last week, something they were prepared for in advance.

“The guys have been going over all the trucks, making sure everything is good and we have extra materials ready to go,” Moore said. “We’ll have chain saws ready for limbs, and extra gas so we can be prepared ahead of the storm.”

“We’ll be out maintaining lines, checking them and if we need to make adjustments and switch some of the (electricity) load around, we’ll be ready to do that. Russellville has two substations, so it may be best to switch some customers to another circuit. And if we need to do that, we’ll be able to switch before it’s too late,” he added.

Challenges don’t intimidate Moore. He’s made a career meeting them.

“I really enjoy challenges. Dealing with electricity is one of those things you can’t see, smell or hear most of the time. You must be respectful of electricity every day and not make mistakes. And having those challenges is something that drew me to this career—to be able to say I work high voltage in a safe, efficient manner. Once I started doing it, I really enjoyed it,” Moore said.

His pledge to ratepayers is something Moore takes seriously.

“We want to provide the highest quality of electricity and service with the lowest rate we can give, along with the best customer service we can offer each day,” Moore said.



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Bobcats 'buzzer beater' gives PC 50-48 win at Russellville

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The varsity basketball teams of Belgreen High School and Phil Campbell High School met on the hardwood Tuesday night with each school taking home a win in the inter-Franklin County matchup.

The varsity girls' teams started the evening with an overtime thriller that saw the Lady Bobcats eke out a narrow victory over the hosting Lady Bulldogs, 44-42, while the result in the boys' game went to Belgreen, who beat PCHS 44-36.

In the first game, the visiting Lady Bobcats led at the conclusion of the first three quarters of play, but Belgreen, in small increments, narrowed the gap after each to eventually tie the game 39-39 at the end of regulation.

In overtime, Phil Campbell, led by four points from Leela Baker in that decisive period, did just enough to sneak by Belgreen, outscoring the hosts 5-3.

Baker, who finished the game with 17 total points, was PCHS' top scorer in the contest, while Belgreen senior Dacota Green led all scorers with 21 points in the loss. Phil Campbell's Siddalee Rogers also got to double-digit points, scoring 11.

The Belgreen and Phil Campbell boys

See, 'BOBCATS,' Page 12

Belgreen, Phil Campbell split varsity basketball games

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

A buzzer-beating and a blowout were the results of Monday night's hardwood contests between Phil Campbell High School and Russellville High School: the Lady Bobcats of PCHS picked up a narrow, last-second win, 50-48, over the Lady Golden Tigers from RHS, while the Russellville varsity boys' basketball more than doubled up Phil Campbell, 72-34.

The Phil Campbell varsity girls' basketball team's win over the Lady Golden Tigers gave the hosts the home-and-away season sweep over the Class 5A visitors.

Both contests were tight affairs: Phil Campbell walked away with a four-point, 54-50 victory at Russellville back on December 13th; a month later, the path to victory was even narrower for the Lady Bobcats.



Belgreen boys' varsity coach Will Bonner during the Bulldogs' game with Phil Campbell.

COURTESY PHOTO

See, 'SPLIT,' Page 13

Russellville varsity boys' hoops now 2-0 in area play after comeback win at Lawrence County

Kadin Pounders
 Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School varsity boys' basketball team jumped out to a perfect 2-0 start in the area and extended its winning streak against area opponents to 16 games last week after fierce battles against West Point and Lawrence County on January 7th and January 9th.

The Golden Tigers, hosting West Point at the Russellville Middle School gymnasium, initiated Class 5A Area 15 play with an 11-point victory over the Warriors last Tuesday. In a game that saw a handful of technical fouls—a side effect of the heated nature of the contest—Russellville eked by in a 76-65 win marking five straight victories against the Warriors.

Up by seven points, 40-33, at halftime, the Golden Tigers, led by a season-high 44 points from senior guard EJ King, needed cool heads and a steady second-half performance to keep the Warriors at bay and seal their first win of 2025.

"That's (Class) 5A area basketball. It's been this way for—this is my 10th season now," Russellville head coach Patrick Odom said of the supercharged atmosphere during the game.

"I tell our guys, we've gotta appreciate that everybody wants to beat us so bad. (West Point is) a really good team with a lot of weapons, but I thought we played really well," he added. "I love the calmness of our guys. We just kept playing, you know? That wasn't a perfect game for us, but I love how we played. The composure and things, when things were getting a little bit crazy, I thought we just held to what we're supposed to do."

The Golden Tigers, scoring 16 points in the third period, extended their advantage to nine points heading into the final eight minutes. A 20-point fourth quarter, highlighted by 12 points from King, finished the job as the hosts' lead jumped to a conclusive 11 points.

Odom said he was pleased with how his players conducted themselves on the court, keeping their heads when emotions ran high. That discipline, in part, helped the Golden Tigers achieve

See, 'COMEBACK,' Page 14

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'BOBCATS,' From Page 11

capped the night at the BHS gymnasium.



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The two teams traded blows in the first half: Belgreen jumped out to a 14-8 lead on Phil Campbell after the opening quarter, but the Bobcats reversed the situation heading into the halftime by scoring 13 points and holding the Bulldogs to five points.

The second half was all Belgreen, however. The hosts, led by first-year head coach Will Bonner, outpaced PCHS 14-10 in the third period and 11-5 in the fourth to pull out an eight-point victory.

Braycen Johnson led the Bulldogs with 15 points in the win, while Phil Campbell sophomore Austin Elliott led his squad with 15 points in the Bobcats' loss

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'SPLIT,' From Page 11

Phil Campbell led Russellville for the entire first half, holding a 12-8 lead after the opening eight minutes and then a 23-18 advantage at halftime. But RHS surged coming out of the break and reversed the situation to take a three-point, 38-35 lead after the third quarter. That set the stage for a nerve-racking final period of play, one that would eventually come down to the final few tenths of a second.

In the dying minutes, Russellville held a four-point lead, but critical takeaways and forced mistakes by Phil Campbell's Macy Hardy gave the Lady Bobcats an opportunity to even up the score—PCHS took advantage and hit the baskets it needed.

Tied 48-48 with less than 30 seconds remaining, the Lady Bobcats had possession and looked to take the final shot of regulation. The seconds ticking away, PCHS scrambled for an open look, but Russellville made it difficult. Finally, though, the breakthrough was made. With literally no time to spare, Mia Ambrosio found herself underneath the basket, received the pass, and laid in the game-winner as the horn sounded.

The bucket was just Ambrosio's second of the game—her fourth point—but it was the decider that handed PCHS its 15th of the season.

Phil Campbell's victory also wouldn't have been possible without a standout performance by Leela Baker, who dropped a game-high 31 points, more than half of the Lady Bobcats' total. Hardy, who made some key defensive plays, finished with six points.

Russellville sophomore Ella Copeland led the way for the Lady Golden Tigers with 25 points in the loss, while Angeleah Smith added 14 points for RHS.

The following boys' game wasn't quite as tantalizing as Russellville took care of business fairly easily against Phil Campbell.

The Bobcats hung around for the first quarter and, in fact, had a lead over the Golden Tigers midway through the period. After that, however, Russellville gained control. The visitors took a 10-point lead after the first quarter and then extended their advantage to 22 points at halftime.

In the second half it was more of the same as the Golden Tigers continued to increase their lead, eventually triggering a running clock.

Russellville was led to victory by 27 points from all-state guard EJ King. Senior Jah Williams tacked on 11 points and Parker Odom added eight.

Phil Campbell senior Hayden Wingo scored a team-high 14 points for the Bobcats and sophomore Austin Elliott scored nine.

Up next for the Phil Campbell teams is the Franklin County Tournament, hosted by Red Bay High School, which will start on January 14th and end on Saturday, January 18th. PCHS will play its first games of the tourney on Friday; the girls will face Vina at 6 P.M. and the boys will matchup with Belgreen after that.

Russellville's next contests will be on the road at area rival West Point on Friday.

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'COMEBACK,' From Page 11

the win, an important "first step" in the program's race for a fifth-straight area crown.

"Our message to our guys all the time is just to go be us; go do what we do and trust the process of how we play. And I think we saw that," Odom said. "We've gotta clean up a few things, but I guess the great thing is we're not a finished product yet, and we don't want to be that until the end of this month.

"Our guys—and (West Point's) guys, too—you wanna play with an edge. You wanna play with an edge, but you've gotta know where the line is. It kinda turned into a chippy game, but we survived. We're where we need to be to get ready for step number two," Odom added. "It's a great first step, and that's really all it is: a first step. We gotta get ready for the next one." The next one, at Lawrence County in Moulton on the following Thursday, no one was quite ready for.

The Golden Tigers started slow against the Red Devils and as a result trailed for almost the entire game. Russellville went into the halftime break behind by 10 points, 38-28. After the intermission, Russellville ate into the deficit slightly, trailing by six points heading into the fourth quarter. But it was the final period of play when events really took a turn.

In the final eight minutes, the Golden Tigers' defensive effort—steals, blocked shots, and fast break points—brought the two teams within a basket of each other. Down 66-65 with less than 30 seconds remaining a questionable charge called on EJ King robbed RHS of a chance to take the lead or tie and—it seemed—consequently force RHS to foul to stay in striking range.

But once again, the Golden Tiger defense came up huge. With 19 seconds remaining, RHS still down a point, a long inbounds pass by Lawrence County was intercepted by senior Rylan Pratt beyond halfcourt. Pratt quickly found his teammate Malachi Groce, who, in turn, found a wide-open Cam Phinizee—frantically waving for the ball—bolting into the paint. Phinizee, amidst the wild shouts from Golden Tiger fans, hit a floating, go-ahead layup—no backboard needed, thank you—with less than 10 seconds left.

"I felt like we should've been at the free throw line with a chance to take the lead just previously on a wild charge call, but we were gonna try to get it on the first pass," Odom said in a postgame radio interview. "We were preparing for it—we weren't surprised—but seeing it in the game is different.

"Really felt like with three minutes to go we were fixing to take control of the game and then, you know, craziness happens," he added. "Of course, in the end, we decided to get out of here with a win, but it's a testament to we know how to win."

Odom praised the fight and resiliency of his team from tip-off to final buzzer, as well as the players who stepped up during the game.

"Look back at the first half, just about everything that could go wrong went wrong, and I thought the second half—I told

our guys, "look, there's no 10-point plays. We've been here before. Let's just keep chipping away, chip away," Odom said. "We've won a lot of these games and our guys absolutely refused to get beat tonight, even on the night where we could've probably made excuses that we did," he added.

"I love our guys. Rylan is, you know, a guy that's been playing every night but gosh; a couple big threes and still right there at the end. Just unbelievable. A senior stepping up in a big moment making a big play. You can go across the room of just the little plays that were made by guys. Sir Williams probably had the best game he's played. And just the whole team—a great team effort to survive and we can get out of here and go play in the snow."

At the end of the year, no one asks how a team wins but just asks that they do. Russellville's 2-0 start to area play may not have been achieved through the prettiest performances, but the results leave the Golden Tigers in pole position with tournament time fast approaching.

"The game played out differently than we wanted it to play out...but, you know, when you go on the road, don't matter how pretty it is, just gotta find a way," Odom said. "We walk out of here 2-0 in a three-team area. We talked all week if we could win these two, we're in the driver's seat. It's not done by any means but especially to come over here and win on the road was big."

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COURTESY PHOTO

EJ King drives the lane during Russellville's win over West Point.

Golden Tigers girls' varsity opens area play 1-1

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

After suffering a blowout defeat at the hands of the No. 5-ranked West Point Lady Warriors to open Class 5A Area 15 play, the Russellville High School varsity girls' basketball team went on the road and defeated Lawrence County to start area play 1-1 last week.

On January 7th, the Lady Golden Tigers were routed at home 66-29 to open the 2025 calendar year before two days later, on January 9th, getting back to .500 in the area with a 10-point road victory in Moulton.

Hosting the Lady Warriors at the Russellville Middle School gymnasium, Russellville trailed the entire game but the visitors really turned up the heat in the second half. Struggling to work around West Point's aggressive defense and hit shots in the final 16 minutes, Russellville was pushed into a deeper and deeper hole, eventually falling by a 37-point margin.

"West Point is a really physical team," Russellville head coach Jermaine Groce said. "They're going to pressure you, they're going to aggressively try to trap you, they're going to slap down at the ball, and they're just going to force you into some things that you're not going to like. It's going to be an uncomfortable game unless you can embrace pressure."

Russellville's inability to cope with West Point's pressure and aggressiveness, Groce said, was the biggest letdown for him, especially after he felt his team did a good job of it in the games leading up to the WPHS contest.

"(West Point) did a great job of adjusting their pressure package and did some things that made us uncomfortable," he said. The RHS head coach said he felt his team played well defensively in the first half—the Lady Golden Tigers trailed 27-14 at the half-time break—but the shots were just not falling for Russellville.

"Our girls thrive, everybody thrives off each other," Groce said. "When you make shots, you play a lot better; you play faster and you play a lot more energetic. But when everything's not falling and everything's tough, it drags you down."

In the second half, after the Lady Warriors jumped on the hosts right out of the break, the wheels started to come off and the Lady Golden Tigers' offensive woes got even worse. RHS managed to score just three points in the fourth period.

"We went into halftime down 13 (points), which, outside of the turnovers in transition, I felt like was a really good job of us," Groce said. "You come out in the second half, try to make some shots and get things going, but (West Point) came out and hit some shots really quick and then it just forced us to have to try to pressure them."

"West Point does a great job versus man pressure, and it makes everything really tough from there when you're trying to play catch-up," he added.

See 'OPENS,' Page 16

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'OPENS,' From Page 15

Groce said he hoped the West Point defeat would serve as another learning opportunity for a really young Russellville squad. "You know, the only person that has a whole lot of varsity experience is Ella (Copeland), followed by Laila (Hill), our junior," he said.



COURTESY PHOTO

"There's some things that happened well in the first half, some things that happened well in the second half, and we've just gotta figure out how to blend all of that together the second time we play them.

"You just gotta learn what you can learn from it and put it away," Groce added.

Sophomore Ella Copeland led the Lady Golden Tigers with 13 points in the loss and Angeleah Smith scored eight points.

Russellville's fortunes were reversed for the better in its next game two days later at Lawrence County. The Lady Golden Tigers led for most of the game against the Lady Red Devils, who came into the matchup with a 1-14 record, and ultimately left with a 10-point margin of victory.

"Any time you can come to Lawrence County and pick up an area win, it's great," Groce said in a postgame radio interview. "It's big because it's hard to come down here, it's always a tough ballgame. It's probably our biggest rivalry, so it's special for us to be able to pull off the win."

In a hostile environment, the game was not without its chal-

lenges for the Lady Golden Tigers. Leading 26-19 at half-

Russellville's Ella Copeland drives for a basket against West Point.

time, RHS overcame second-half foul trouble as well as a 15-8 run by the Lady Red Devils in the third quarter that pulled the hosts within four points heading into the fourth. Unlike in the West Point game, however, Russellville was able to sink its shots and press LCHS effectively in the final eight minutes, and that made all the difference in the outcome.

"We decided to bring a lot of pressure. We encouraged the girls to try to be more aggressive, to foul more, and they took it to heart," Groce added. "We had at least four or five (in foul trouble) at the end of the game. But the girls played a lot harder in the second half, and we were able to keep them off balance enough to pull out the victory."

Smith, who led the Lady Golden Tigers with a personal season-high 23 total points, really came alive in the final period of play, showing off her range from beyond the arch and helping push Russellville over the finish line. With Lawrence County keying in on Copeland, who finished with 17 points, it left Smith with plenty of open opportunities to hit shots from deep.

"Lawrence County did a good job of blitzing Ella Copeland, but we did a good job of turning the ball and finding Angeleah in the corner, and she made them pay," Groce said. "If you're going to keep trying to trap, it's great to have somebody that can knock down the three-point shot right there in the corner. She kept knocking them down—one of her best shooting nights of the year."

RHS ended up scoring 21 points in the fourth quarter, six more than Lawrence County, to give the visitors the 59-49 win. After the West Point game, Groce said getting a victory against Lawrence County would be critical for postseason positioning. The Lady Golden Tigers got the result they were looking for and will look to press their advantage when they host Lawrence County on January 24th.

"If you can go in and beat Lawrence County, now we're in position to be the two-seed going into the area tournament," he said. "We can go in and beat Lawrence County and then beat them again the second time, we get to host that two-three (seed) game here (at home), then that would be great for us to hopefully advance to play West Point and see what we can do from there."

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

EJ King - Russellville boys' basketball
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