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RUSSELLVILLE

Goodwin leaving Russellville for Demopolis after two seasons at the helm of Golden Tiger varsity football

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

After a two-year stint as varsity football coach at Russellville High School, Dustin Goodwin will step down after accepting the same position at Demopolis High School, the Franklin Free Press has learned.

Goodwin met with his Russellville coaching staff and players Friday morning to inform them of his decision.

Russellville City Schools Superintendent of Education Tim Guinn confirmed Goodwin would be leaving Russellville with an effective resignation date of January 16, 2026. Goodwin will use vacation

days until his employment at Russellville officially ends, so he is not expected to return to campus, Guinn said.

The varsity football head coach position is now posted on the Russellville City Schools' website and is open for applications to be submitted.

"It was posted as of today (January 9, 2026)," Guinn said. "We are moving forward immediately with finding a new varsity football coach."

Guinn did not specify a timeframe as to when a new coach would be hired, but did say the position will be filled as soon as possible, as evidenced by the immediate job posting.

See 'GOODWIN,' Page 4

Eight qualify in first week for local office in May 19th Republican Primary

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Through one week of qualifying, eight candidates have qualified to run in the May 19, 2026, Republican Primary for five different local offices.

Franklin County Republican Executive Committee Chairman Glenn Garrison said the following candidates had completed and filed their paperwork to run in the Republican Primary:

—Franklin County Sheriff: Shannon Oliver, Brian Shackelford.

—Franklin County Revenue Commissioner: Stratt Byars.

—Franklin County Coroner: Charles Adcox, Jeff Clark.

—Franklin County Board of

Education Place 3: Pat Cochran.

—Franklin County Commission District 1 (Special Election): Curtis Baker, Miles Gaston, Joey Norton.

This list was complete through January 11, 2026, but Garrison said he has been contacted by several other individuals, both incumbents and challengers, who expressed an intent or interest in running.

Franklin County Democratic Executive Committee Chairman Rick Neighbors said there were no local qualifiers as of January 11th in the Franklin County Democratic Primary, but the committee was scheduled to meet January 13th to discuss plans to encourage local residents to qualify before the January 23, 2026 5:00 p.m., deadline.

See 'QUALIFYING' Page 4



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**Arlin Ray Greenhill, 78, of Russellville, passed away
January 8th. Pinkard Funeral Home assisted the
family with arrangements.**

**Chrystal Reed Sherrill, 68, of Moulton, passed away
January 7th at her residence. Spry Memorial Chapel
of Russellville assisted the family with arrange-
ments.**

**John Laney McAnally, 76, of Russellville, passed
away January 7th at Helen Keller Hospital. No serv-
ices were scheduled. Spry Memorial Chapel as-
sisted the family with arrangements.**

**Bernice Opal Riggs, 91, of Russellville, passed away
January 6th at her home. Akins Funeral Home as-
sisted the family with arrangements.**



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*The Franklin Free Press is published weekly by Pilati Investments, Inc.
Our publication is available at newsstands and online at no charge.*

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Correction Policy

The Franklin Free Press strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

The Franklin Free Press is published by

hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler:

Matthew 11:1-19

Jesus gave instructions to His disciples and then went to teach Himself.

John sent to ask Jesus if He was the promised One or if they needed to look for someone else. Perhaps John, in prison, wasn't sure things were working out how they were supposed to. Jesus said to tell John what was happening— healings, raisings, and poor hearing the gospel! He was citing Isaiah 35:5 and 61:1 which looked forward to the coming One. Jesus was the One, indeed. He also said that it was a blessing not to be offended at Him. That is, don't stumble because Jesus wasn't what you expected.

Some might have lowered their conception of John given his question. But, Jesus explained. He wasn't wishy-washy or used to only comfortable circumstances. He was a prophet of God! More than that, He was preparing the way for the coming of the Lord (the messenger Malachi had prophesied about)!

In fact, Jesus said that there wasn't anybody who exceeded John's status. Well, except for even the least of those who had come under God's reign. That is no denigration of John, but a description of the glorious blessing of being under the reign of God's King.

Despite their position of honor, citizens of the kingdom would suffer persecution.

John was the beginning of a new era. In fact, John was the promised Elijah who was to come (see Mal. 4:5-6). If they had ears, they needed to be paying attention.

But, they couldn't be satisfied. They were like bratty children who don't want to play no matter how much other kids try to include them. They accused John of demon possession and Jesus of over-indulgence. They played different tunes, but the religious leaders didn't want to dance.

However, the effects on those who responded to John and Jesus would illustrate that God's way is the way of wisdom.

Lessons to Learn:

Even great people of faith have questions. God does not call us to perfect understanding, but to trust and loyalty. We don't have all the answers regarding why things are going the way they are, but let's not stumble. Jesus is the King. Know His way is best.

See the great value of kingdom citizenship. It's not wrong to pursue greatness, but we want the right kind. Real greatness is being under the reign of Christ. It may come with earthly suffering. Still, choose kingdom greatness.

Don't make Jesus fit your bill. Often the Jesus we serve is one we have invented in our mind, accepting us just as we are, never calling us to any changes, and never doing something that I couldn't tolerate or understand. That is not the way it works. He is Lord, I am not

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'GOODWIN,' from Page 1

Goodwin was hired at Russellville in 2024 and coached two seasons of Golden Tiger football, compiling a 14-9 record, including a 1-2 playoff record. Russellville finished as 5A Region 7 runner up both of Goodwin's two seasons.

Goodwin's other head coaching experience includes four years at Chelsea High School and three years at Plainview High School. His Plainview teams won a combined 21-12 and his Chelsea record was 15-27 in four years at the school. He served as Offensive Assistant and Wide Receivers Coach for 7A power Thompson in 2022 and 2023, as part of the coaching staff of the school's 2022 state championship team.

He began his coaching career as quarterbacks coach on the 2008 Russellville High School staff, where his father Doug served as head coach at the time. Goodwin was on the staff of two state runner-up teams while at Russellville.

Goodwin's wife Sara, a guidance counselor for Russellville City Schools, has not submitted her resignation and is expected to conclude the school year at Russellville or at least through late spring, Guinn said.

Sources tell the *FFP* Goodwin accepted the verbal offer from Demopolis officials earlier this week and Guinn said he was notified by Goodwin on Monday that the coach would be leaving.

The Demopolis City Schools Board of Education is expected to meet early next week and formally hire Goodwin. The next board meeting for Russellville City Schools is Tuesday, January 15th. Guinn said Goodwin has not officially tendered his written resignation so that item is not expected to be on the January 15th agenda.

The more likely scenario, Guinn explained, would be to call a special board meeting once Goodwin's letter of resignation has been tendered.

Goodwin is a Demopolis High School graduate where he was an All-State athlete in both football and baseball. He attended Auburn University after graduation and was on the school's 2004 football team. Goodwin graduated from the University of North Alabama where he was part of the Lions' 2006 Gulf South Conference Championship football team.

In addition to his Demopolis ties, where his father had a successful head coaching tenure as well, the pending Alabama High School Athletic Association reclassification may have contributed to Goodwin's decision to leave Russellville.

With the anticipated January 23rd release of athletic realignment for the 2026 and 2027 school years, comes a growing likelihood that Russellville, although expected to remain in 5A, might be placed in a region with several schools that are currently 6A, including Muscle Shoals, Cullman and Decatur High Schools. This would create a significantly more difficult region alignment than Russellville has seen the past 10-plus seasons.

With the likelihood that private schools will be competing in their own playoff classification starting next year, the number of high schools to be classified from 1A-7A will significantly decrease, leading to the anticipated classification for many current 6A schools.

Attempts to reach Goodwin for comment have been unsuccessful.

'QUALIFYING,' from Page 1

Neighbors also said the local party is looking for a new Franklin County Chairman, as he plans to step down after the 2026 election cycle.

Although the Alabama Republican State Executive Committee set a qualifying deadline of January 23, 2026, at 5 p.m., for state and federal office candidates, Garrison said the deadline for Franklin County qualifying would be earlier.

On Sunday, Garrison told the *FFP* the local deadline would be 5 p.m., Thursday, January 15th, although he said that might be extended by a few days, but would not be pushed back to January 23rd.

Garrison said the local GOP revised its bylaws and a candidate steering committee would meet later this week or early next week to review candidate filings. Garrison said that committee must approve all candidates seeking to run for local office in May.

Garrison explained his reason for pushing up the qualifying deadline date as resulting from 'the extensive amount of work required' for him to have adequate time to file all necessary paperwork with the state GOP.

Garrison provided his email address of AlabamaGGG33gop@yahoo.com for anyone with questions about qualifying to contact him.

All local office qualifiers must pay a qualifying fee in the amount of two percent of the annual compensation for the office they seek.

In addition to these local offices, qualifying is ongoing at the state level for numerous state and federal offices. Some early qualifiers as of January 12, 2026, in the Republican and Democratic Primaries, with political party noted, include:

—United States Senate: Rodney Walker (R), Dakarai Larriett (D), Kyle Sweetser (D), Mark S. Wheeler II (D).

—United States House of Representatives, Alabama District 4: Robert Aderholt (R), Amanda Puszczek (D).

—Governor: Tommy Tuberville (R), Will Boyd (D), Doug Jones (D).

—Lieutenant Governor: Nicole James Wadsworth (R), Phillip Ensler (D).

—Attorney General: Katherine Robertson (R), Jay Mitchell (R).

—Secretary of State: Caroleene Dobson (R), Wayne Rogers (D).

—State Treasurer: Steve Lolley (R), Young Boozer (R).

—State Auditor: Andrew Sorrell (R), Derek Chen (R), Violet Edwards (D).

In addition to the above offices, both parties are having qualifying for their respective state executive committees, with candidates running by House District.

As of January 12, 2026 though, no candidates had filed to run for either party's state executive committee.

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Alabama Supreme Court reverses order dismissing lawsuit related to Red Bay gas line expansion project

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

A lawsuit filed by a contractor seeking more than \$800,000 against the Water Works and Gas Board of the City of Red Bay now move forward after the Alabama Supreme Court reversed a lower court order that would have resulted in the dismissal of the case.

Pinpoint Locating, Inc., filed the lawsuit in Franklin County Circuit Court alleging it was owed more than \$800,000 for work performed on four public-works contracts related to a gas line replacement and expansion project in and around the City of Red Bay.

Franklin County Circuit Judge Brian Hamilton granted a Motion for Summary Judgment filed by the Water Works and Gas Board of the City of Red Bay, ruling the contracts to be void because of 'defective advertising.'

According to court filings, the Water Works and Gas Board of the City of Red Bay (the Board) allegedly ceased payment on the \$4.4 million project that was broken into four phases: A Cast Iron Replacement Project, and Red Bay Expansion Projects Phase One, Phase Two and Phase Three.

Pinpoint was the lone contractor to bid on each phase and the Board accepted those bids and entered into four separate contracts with Pinpoint.

The Board's decision to stop payment on the contracts was on the advice of its attorney, based on the original bid allegedly not complying with Alabama law related to bid-advertising requirements.

Pinpoint began work on the Cast Iron Replacement Project, which it completed by October 2022. Additionally, Pinpoint completed 100% of Phase Three, 72% of Phase Two and 62% of Phase One.

Those percentages were certified by Magnolia River Services, Inc., who was retained to design and manage the project and prepare specs for each phase.

In its lawsuit, Pinpoint asserts it installed 138,625 feet (more than 26 miles) of new gas lines and received \$2,822 million in payments from the Board, but is still owed \$811,300.52 for work it completed.

Board attorney Danny McDowell sent a letter to Pinpoint on May 6, 2023, indicating the Board could not legally make additional payments under the contracts because the advertisement for sealed bids was not compliant with Alabama law at the time.

Pinpoint alleges the Board actually stopped payment because of financial difficulty resulting from an additional \$1 million in project costs resulting from Alabama Department of Transportation mandated change orders, and the alleged advertising defects were 'a convenient legal pretext.'

After Pinpoint's post-judgment Motion to Alter, Amend or Vacate the Court's summary judgment was denied, it filed an appeal to the Supreme Court of Alabama.

Essentially, the Supreme Court decided that there was 'substantial compliance' with the mandatory advertising requirements and ruled there was substantial evidence to create a genuine issue of fact for a trial court or jury to decide.

The Board maintains the Red Bay News, the newspaper used to advertise for bids, was not a newspaper of general circulation throughout Alabama, something required by the Code of Alabama.

That issue is properly for the trial court and/or a jury to decide, as the Supreme Court said it could 'reasonably' be found that the statute's objectives were 'substantially achieved.'

The Court's ruling comes as potentially good news to Alabama businesses and contractors who perform work under public-works contracts, even if there are minor or technical advertising defects.

The 'substantial compliance' issue is a factual issue appropriate for the Court or jury to decide, making it more difficult for public entities to prevail on summary judgment motions that can lead to early dismissal of the cases. This eliminates prior precedents where a zero-tolerance approach was taken on technical advertising defects where the objectives of competitive bidding have been 'substantially achieved.'

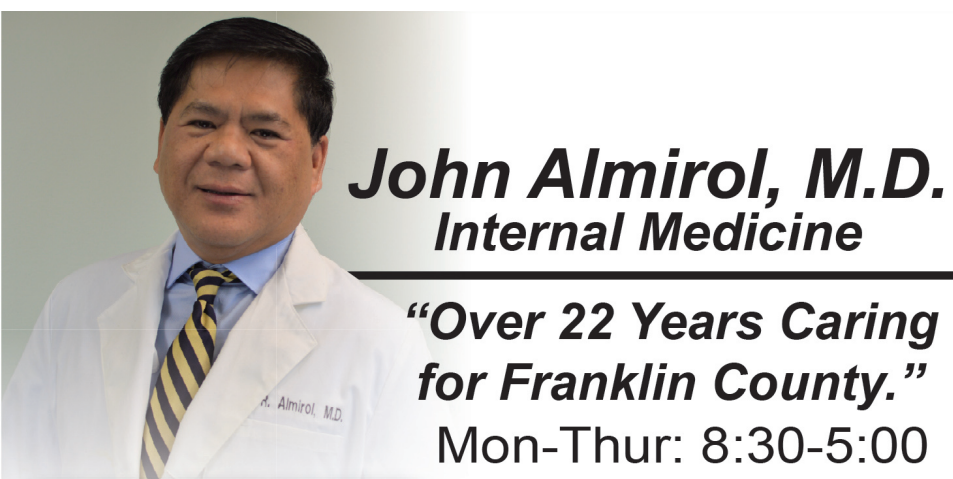
While the Supreme Court's ruling now gives Pinpoint Locating, Inc., the opportunity to have its day in court, it will still have to prove its case at trial.

According to one former Board member who spoke with the FFP last week, the Board followed the advice of its attorney not to make additional payments. Additionally, the source said Pinpoint filed its lawsuit before additional payments were due and Pinpoint demanded 'mobilization fee' before it would come back to perform any additional remaining work.

"That fee was astronomical. And when we reviewed some of their billing it was not correct and the engineering company wasn't giving us reports on the work being done, so that was a factor in our decision to stop paying," the source said.

The source said Phases One, Two and Three were to be done in that order, but the project manager decided to do Phase Three first in conflict with how they were supposed to be done.

The case will be set for trial in Franklin County Circuit Court later this year.



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 **T**he Russellville First Methodist Church will have a 5th Thursday Food Giveaway on Thursday, January 29th, at 311 N Jackson Ave., Russellville, AL, beginning at 1 pm. Please use the back entrance from Washington Ave. Remain in your car, have your ID ready, and allow our volunteers to serve you. Note: In case of inclement weather, the giveaway will be rescheduled.


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Russellville City Council approves biometric fingerprint system purchase for RPD

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved the purchase of a state-of-the-art LiveScan Plus biometric data collection system for the Russellville Police Department at the council's January 5th meeting.

The new system, which includes a PC workstation, software, palm/fingerprint scanner and installation and training, comes at a cost of \$14,250.

The department's current LiveScan Plus hardware has been in use since 2012 and replacement equipment and peripherals are no longer available or viable with today's advanced technology.

The contract with DataWorks Plus states the city will also provide a digital camera and FBI certified printer with necessary cabling. Delivery is expected 30-90 days after receipt of the order, which was approved Monday.

The LiveScan Plus allows for collection, storage, search and managing of every piece of biometric data from the criminal booking process. It is considered at the forefront of technology available to law enforcement departments today.

In other agenda items at its January 5th meeting, the council:

—approved a resolution recognizing January 19, 2026, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Russellville and commending the efforts of the Franklin County Branch of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship Committee in organizing and planning a commemoration march in downtown Russellville set for 11 a.m., on January 19th.

—approved a resolution recognizing January at National Human Trafficking Prevention Month along with the council's commitment to human trafficking awareness, training and education in Russellville.

—rescinded a previously approved contract with Russellville Police Department Chaplain Bobby Brown and approved an updated contract for the 12 month period from December 1, 2025 through November 30, 2026.



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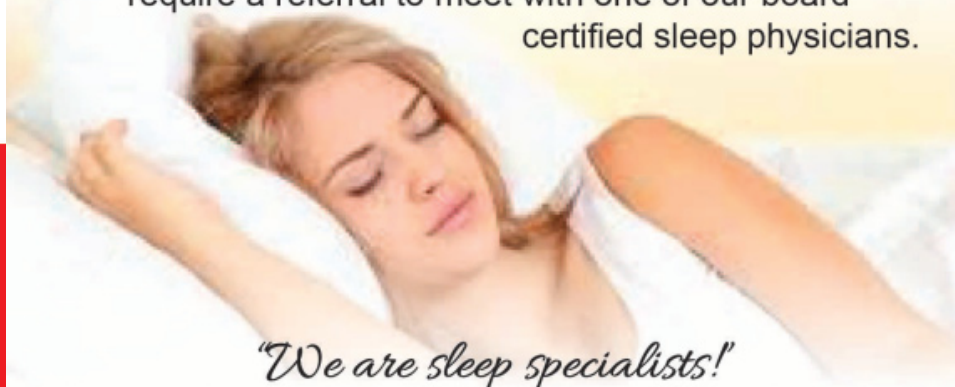
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Northwest Shoals and Jacksonville State launch Sonography Transfer Pathway

Submitted

Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) and Jacksonville State University (Jax State) signed a new articulation agreement on Friday (1/9) to support the education and training of diagnostic medical sonographers.

The agreement allows NWSCC graduates who have earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in Diagnostic Medical Sonography (DMS) to seamlessly transfer into Jax State's Integrated Studies program to pursue a Bachelor of Arts. The pathway makes them eligible for scholarships and gives sonography professionals an opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree.

"Northwest Shoals takes great pride in how we prepare and train our students for successful health science careers," said NWSCC President Dr. Jeff Goodwin. "This new partnership with Jacksonville State gives our Diagnostic Medical Sonography graduates a clear, affordable path to a bachelor's degree. We hope this will open more doors to advanced roles in health care."

The Northwest Shoals DMS program provides students with the knowledge and hands-on training needed to succeed in the sonography industry, including abdomen, small parts, obstetrics-gynecology and vascular sonography.

Jacksonville State University's Integrated Studies program is designed as a flexible degree-completion option in which students work with advisors to design their own interdisciplinary curriculum. The Bachelor of Arts program allows students to build an individualized course of study that integrates academic coursework with prior technical training and professional experience. Students develop a degree plan aligned with their career goals, making the program well-suited for healthcare professionals such as diagnostic medical sonographers seeking leadership, advancement, or expanded opportunities within the field.

Through the new partnership, eligible NWSCC graduates may be awarded up to 36 hours of technical credit for their DMS courses, which will be applied as Integrated Studies electives at Jax State. Students may transfer up to 52 credit hours from NWSCC, including general education courses and electives. They then work with an Integrated Studies advisor at Jax State to design a degree plan that aligns with their career goals. For a more in-depth look at the pathway, visit <https://jsu.edu/pla/pathways.html>.

"This agreement creates a meaningful next step for highly trained healthcare professionals who want to build on their credentials," said Dr. Don C. Killingsworth, Jr., President of Jacksonville State University. "By partnering with Northwest Shoals, we're helping diagnostic medical sonography graduates turn their technical expertise into a bachelor's degree that supports career advancement, leadership opportunities, and long-term success in the healthcare workforce."

Thank You to all 'Cottons for Christmas' sock drive supporters

Dear Editor,

The Franklin County Farmers Federation Women's Committee would like to thank each and everyone of you for your generous donations during our annual "Cottons for Christmas" sock drive.

With your help we were able to collect over 400 pairs of socks. For 2025 we made those donations to the patients of Burns Nursing Home. Each patient received multiple pairs of socks thanks to your help!

We also collected approximately 50 pairs of children's socks and those were donated to the Children's Home.

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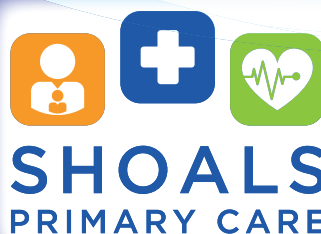
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Russellville varsity basketball squads swept by area rival West Point

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Russellville High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams were swept at home by area rival West Point on Friday night, setting the two teams back in the race for the No. 1 seed in the area tournament later this campaign.

The RHS girls, who faced off against the No. 4 team in Class 5A, fell 69-46 to the Lady Warriors, while the Russellville boys were toppled 56-40 by WPHS.

In the girls' matchup the Lady Golden Tigers didn't play poorly but fared how one might expect a young squad against a top five team in the state.

"It was a tough area game. West Point always comes out and forces you to play well the entire game," Russellville girls' head coach Jermaine Groce said. "I am proud of how our girls competed. There was a little stress in the game and it had a playoff atmosphere, and we wouldn't want anything less."

While West Point continued to extend its lead slowly but surely throughout the contest, there was a feeling that the Lady Golden Tigers were never quite out of it. Still, WPHS was able to push its advantage to 23-points by the end of the game.

West Point doubled up on Russellville 18-9 in the first period and led 39-23 by halftime.

See, 'RVL HOOPS,' Page 14

Belgreen girls, boys beat Covenant Christian to improve in area standings

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The Belgreen High School varsity girls' and boys' basketball teams grabbed home area wins on Tuesday night, sweeping the visiting Covenant Christian Eagles to improve their respective standings in Class 2A Area 14.

The BHS girls routed the Lady Eagles to start the evening at the Belgreen gymnasium, winning 56-25 to improve to 12-6 overall and a perfect 3-0 in area play.

The Lady Bulldogs and Lady Eagles battled to a 13-10 scoreline at the end of the first period, but the hosts began to pull away in the second, outscoring Covenant Christian 12-4 to take an 11-point lead into the halftime break.

In the second half Belgreen continued increasing its advantage, finishing strong with a 17-point fourth quarter to secure the 31-point win.

Belgreen senior Makenna Fisher, who surpassed the 1,000 career points mark in Belgreen's previous game against Phil Campbell, recorded her best scoring game of the season, dropping a campaign-best 24 points in the win. Fisher, averaging a team-best 11.8 points per game this season, scored 14 of her team's 25 first-half points.

Lilliana Willingham also scored in the double figures with 13 points.

In the nightcap, Belgreen's boys also picked up a valuable Area 14 victory, squeezing by Covenant Christian 44-39.

A low-scoring first period, which saw just six points scored between the two teams, transitioned to a more enjoyable product in the second quarter. The Bulldogs and Eagles battled

See, 'BELGREEN,' Page 12

East Franklin Ninth Grade Boys Basketball Team closes 17-1 season with County Tournament title

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Just when it was getting fun, the brief but dominant season for the East Franklin Junior High School 9th Grade Boys Basketball team came to an end with the team capturing the Franklin County Tournament Championship for only the third time in school history.

Coach Derrell Potter's team finished with a lofty 17-1 record in a season that began, and ended, with tournament championships. The Rebels began the season in October by winning the Tharptown Tip Off Tournament by defeating Deshler.

Most of the team will move onto Phil Campbell High School next year to continue their basketball careers hoping for similar success to what they've seen the past three seasons.

Two years ago, as seventh graders, East Franklin struggled out of the gate, losing five of their first six games before closing strong and winning four of their final five to finish 5-6.

Last year as eighth graders, Potter's team posted a record of 8-5, laying the groundwork for this year's breakthrough 17-win season.



The East Franklin Junior High Ninth Grade Boys Basketball Team. Back row, from left: Tiffin Burlington, BB Garrison, Bentley Morgan, Titus Nix, Miles Duboise, Braylon Hallman, Luke Morgan, Eli Baker and Coach Derrell Potter. (Courtesy photo)

See, 'EAST FRANKLIN,' Page 13

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'BELGREEN,' from Page 11

basket for basket in the second, but it was the hosts that were able to claim the narrow 18-16 advantage going into the locker room at the half.

Coming out of the break, in the third quarter, Covenant Christian, scoring 19 points to Belgreen's 14, were able to erase the deficit and take a three-point lead going into the final eight minutes of regulation.

But in the fourth, it was Belgreen's turn to make a run. The Bulldogs did not allow Covenant's top scorer, Derek Darby, who finished with a game-high 17 points, to score in the fourth, and Belgreen was able to hold the Eagles to just four points.

While shutting down Covenant's best shooter, Belgreen saw its top player, senior Braycen Johnson, an All-State selection from a year ago—"the difference maker," BHS head coach Will Bonner called him—make his impact known in the final eight minutes.

Johnson, making his return from a broken arm suffered earlier in the campaign, played just 15 minutes for the Bulldogs, but those 15 minutes were very productive ones. In the fourth quarter, he scored nine of Belgreen's 12 points, hitting a jumper, a three-pointer, and nailing all four of his free throw attempts, ultimately propelling BHS to the five-point win.

Johnson would finish the contest with a team-high 14 points in his return. Jake Dill, who knocked down three threes in the game, finished with 13 points for the Bulldogs.

With the win, Belgreen's boys improved to 7-9 overall and 2-1 in the area.

Have a tip or sports story idea? Want to share your local sports photos? Email sports editor Kadin Pounders at franklinfreepress.sports@gmail.com or franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.

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'EAST FRANKLIN' from Page 11

The players who were on all three of those teams finished their East Franklin basketball careers with a record of 30-13.

"I figured we'd be pretty good after how we finished last year," Potter said. "We were runner-up in the County Tournament last season so to get a title this year felt really good."

It's a bittersweet time now for the head coach who will see this special group move on to high school in the next phase of their education and athletic careers.

"You put so much into the team and then you watch them go on to other schools, but I know they'll be successful," Potter said. "This was just the third time in school history we've won the Ninth Grade County Tournament (with the last championship coming in 2003-2004) so it was a great way for their East Franklin basketball story to end."

"I'm really proud of the way they learned to play defense and to play together as a team. They did a great job spreading the floor and passing the ball as well as getting down the court," Potter added.

The eight player roster consisted of Tiffin Burlington, Miles Duboise, Luke Morgan, BB Garrison, Bentley Morgan, Eli Baker, Titus Nix and Braylon Hallman.

Each of the Rebels scored in their final game, the tournament championship against Phil Campbell which East Franklin won 55-21.

They also defeated Belgreen and Tharptown en route to the County Championship. The team's lone loss was a one point defeat at the hands of 5A Lawrence County, 35-34.

Against Phil Campbell, Duboise led the way with 25 points. Burlington added 13 and Garrison 8 to pace the Rebels in a game that saw East Franklin jump out to an early 17-0 lead and a 30-8 advantage at halftime.

The Bobcats' scoring was led by Collin Bell, who had 12 points.



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'RVL HOOPS' from Page 11

At the end of the third quarter, the Lady Warriors had increased the margin by 21 points.

Ultimately the Lady Golden Tigers were unable to get shots to fall when they needed them most.

"West Point is going to force you to attack, force you to get the ball out of your hands quick, and they're going to be super physical with you," Groce said. "I like to think that we shot the ball a lot in that game, but it just didn't go in as much as we would like, and we let one of their shooters get hot. I'm proud of how we played defensively, especially on the interior around the rim, but we just couldn't stay in front of a couple of their best players."

Groce's takeaways from the defeat were that his squad needs to do a better job in the future of limiting easy baskets and second chance opportunities.

"We had a few turnovers that led to easy transition baskets for them—just easy uncontested layups—so we've got to reduce those drastically. And then (West Point) did a good job of getting second chance opportunities and getting rebounds," he said.

Junior guard Ella Copeland, who is averaging 23.4 points per game this season, led Russellville with 22 points in the loss. Senior Laila Hill also added 15 points for the Lady Golden Tigers.

The result drops the RHS girls to 10-8 overall and 1-1 in Class 5A Area 14.

The Russellville boys' basketball team suffered a similar fate as the girls, but the Golden Tigers were able to keep it a little closer, especially in the first half.

RHS trailed 18-14 after the opening period and was down by just two points, 27-25, at halftime.

As has been the case for much of the 2025-26 season, however, the Golden Tigers began to fade in the second half, allowing the Warriors to create separation. West Point finished the first half on a 7-0 run and made it a 13-0 run going into the start of the third quarter.

The Golden Tigers were only able to score 15 points in the final 16 minutes of the game while the visitors scored nearly twice that.

"We had great prep which led to our first half, probably one of the best halves of basketball we've played all year," Russellville boys' head coach Patrick Odom said. "We still just struggled to put the ball in the basket. No matter how hard you play, you still need to see it go through, and that was the difference in the second half."

"As a coach what you want your guys to do is fight their butts off for all four quarters, and I felt like we did that. But our Achilles' heel all year has been getting the ball in the basket," Odom added. "On paper I think West Point is the best team in the area, but I think we showed that we're continuing to work and continuing to grow."

Russellville, which has just three wins this campaign, dropped to 0-2 in the area after the defeat. Odom said that losing area games is obviously never part of the plan, but he feels that there is still plenty of season left and that the Golden Tigers can still achieve positive results if they continue to work hard and get hot at the right time.

"I don't think that I've ever had a group like this one that has gone through the adversity they've gone through and still continues to show up with togetherness and heart," the head coach said. "My first year here (at Russellville) in 2016, I think we went into the area tournament and had won six or seven games. We had a lot of struggles. The funny thing is that no one remembers that; what they remember is that we won the area championship," he added. "Basketball is a crazy game. I believe that we're getting better, and we've played a lot of good teams that have pushed us. I think if we continue to show that growth, we're going to win the right games at the right time."



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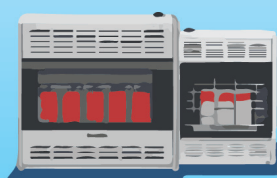
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AHSAA reclassification proposal could see Russellville aligned with former 5A rivals

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

As the Alabama High School Athletic Association's January 23rd self-imposed date to announce reclassification for the 2026-2028 school years approaches, it's a distinct possibility that Russellville High School could be reunited with some former rivals in the revamped plan.

After delaying the reclassification announcement from the original December 15th date, the AHSAA continues to wrestle with the issues of how to classify private schools and whether to group them into their own classification, which would mean no private-public school playoff games for at least the next two years.

The divisive issue results from private schools' concerns they are disadvantaged by the existing competitive balance formula that weights their enrollment with a 1.35 multiplier, resulting in higher classification levels than their actual enrollment would support.

On the other side, public schools have long discussed what they believe to be 'inherent advantages' private schools enjoy because of their additional financial resources and ability to recruit.

Another factor in the debate is Alabama's CHOOSE Act, legislation passed in 2024 that created refundable tax credits, called Education Savings Accounts, which may be used for tuition and expenses for parents to use at 'participating schools,' many of which are private schools.

Essentially, the act allows parents to take their tax dollars with them to a school they believe will better educate their child, including private schools.

While the AHSAA sets standards only for athletics, the CHOOSE Act deals with academic standards, but the transfer of these tax funds from Alabama public schools to private schools is the root of continued debate.

Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) supported the CHOOSE Act, saying these dollars are the taxpayers' money and the act simply allows the taxpayer to direct where the educational funding for their child goes.

Kiel has also been critical of the competitive advantage he believes Alabama private schools enjoy in athletics over their public school counterparts.

Those concerns led him to support legislation last year that would have excluded English Language Learner students (those not fluent in the English language) from schools' average daily membership, used to determine enrollment and athletic classification.

"You have schools with 25% ELL students who can't speak English and don't participate in extracurriculars competing against schools with no ELL students. That creates a competitive advantage for those schools," Kiel said.

That bill did not advance out of committee in last year's Legislative session, but Kiel said he would support it again if reintroduced this year.

Separate public and private school state playoffs and championships are already in effect in states including Georgia, Tennessee and Texas.

With the removal of private schools into their own classification, one AHSAA proposal calls for 32 6A schools and 32 7A schools, along with approximately 60 in 1A-5A schools.

Under this proposal, Phil Campbell, Red Bay and Tharptown High Schools would be in 2A, Belgreen and Vina in 1A and Russellville in 5A, along with former region rivals including Muscle Shoals, Cullman, Decatur, Brewer and Jasper.

Although a leaked copy of the proposal did not show proposed regional alignment, it would be a likely scenario Russellville would be grouped with 5A schools located closest to it.

That could result in RHS competing in a 5A region with several schools currently classified as 6A, a significantly more competitive alignment than the current one, which has seen RHS dominate in Region 7 varsity sports, particularly baseball and football.

A source with knowledge of the AHSAA told the FFP there are other reclassification proposals under consideration, but the likelihood remains strong that private schools will be placed in their own classification.

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How to use mindfulness in your daily living

Stan Popovich

Mindfulness is the practice of becoming more fully aware of the present moment rather than dwelling in the past, projecting into the future, or what's going on around us. It involves a heightened awareness of sensory stimuli such as our breathing and being "in the now." Practicing mindfulness involves breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind.

1. Find a comfortable place: You'll want to find a comfortable seat in a relaxed and stress-free environment. Sit on a couch or chair with your feet on the ground. Allow your head and shoulders to rest comfortably; place your hands on the tops of your legs with upper arms at your side. Put your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs.
2. Focus on your breathing: Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and relax. Keep your attention on the sensation of the inhale and exhale of your breath. Focus on the air moving through your nose or the rising and falling of your stomach and chest.
3. Reduce wandering thoughts: It's normal to have wandering thoughts or distractions, so don't judge yourself if you start becoming distracted. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, let them pass by, without focusing on any thought. Thoughts will try to pull your attention away from your breathing. Notice them, but don't pass judgment. Gently return your focus to your breath.
4. Tune into your senses: Sometimes, when we are stressed, focusing on what's happening right in front of us can be a challenge in and of itself. Our minds are drawn to thinking about the future and all the bad things that are or could happen.
5. Live in the present: Focus your attention on what is happening right now, actively engaging with the current moment instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.
6. Focus on one thing at a time: Multitasking can leave you feeling distracted, so concentrate on one task with your full attention.
7. Pay attention: It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Take the time to experience your environment with all your senses including touch, sound, sight, smell, and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste, and enjoy it.
8. Enjoy the small moments: Small moments in our lives include those that we do not typically notice and those we take for granted. A small moment may be having a cup of coffee or a cool glass of water, spending a moment with a child or pet, or performing any everyday activity that goes by without our attention. Enjoyment, peace, and serenity in life happen in the small moments.
9. Create a safe place: Similar to guided imagery, create a place that is safe and comfortable. It may be your favorite room or a cabin in the woods. Use your senses to fully enter the safe place. Stay in this place for a while and go there whenever you need to soothe and calm yourself.
10. Go outside: Spending time outdoors is a great way to live in the moment and observe the sights, sounds, and sensations around you.

BIOGRAPHY

Stan is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear" which covers 200+ techniques that can drastically improve your mental health.



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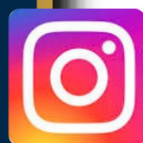
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