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Former RPD officer files second lawsuit

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

A former Russellville police officer has filed a second lawsuit against the City of Russellville, this time alleging retaliation, discriminatory discharge, violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act, gender discrimination and violations of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.

Chelsea Gentry filed the lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama on July 4 of this year. The multi-count complaint follows an earlier law-

suit, still pending in federal court, that alleged gender discrimination on the part of the City of Russellville based on allegations that Gentry, who was promoted and subsequently demoted from the position of sergeant, was discriminated against because she was a female and subjected to different standards as a sergeant because of her gender.

Gentry's attorney, Patricia A. Gill of Birmingham, now represents Gentry in both lawsuits and has filed a motion to consolidate the cases.

The 27-page complaint maintains that the City of Russellville, through its police depart-

ment, created a hostile work environment that became "so intolerable that a reasonable person in her position would have felt compelled to resign." (Page 21, Gentry complaint).

Gentry's claim that the city violated the Fair Labor Standards Act revolves around her assertion that while she was breast-feeding her newborn baby after returning to work after his birth, the city did not provide "a reasonable break time for her to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth," (Page 22, Gentry complaint) and "a place, other than a bathroom,

See 'LAWSUIT,' Page 9

County administrator Madden steps down

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

After 25 years working in local government, Crista Madden has learned not to take things personally.

Madden, who will step down as Franklin County administrator at the end of August, has heard her share of complaints and concerns from the public over a quarter-century. She's never taken it personally. In fact, she encourages people to get involved in local government.

"The fact that I've been here twenty-five years, I guess I see things in a different light. We're here to serve the public," Madden said. "We work for the tax-payers of Franklin County. Most of the time when they come in to county commission meetings, they have a

legitimate concern. People need more than anything to know someone cares about their problem.

"Often the issue is we don't have enough money to do what we'd like to do to help them, but I admire people who come to meetings and get involved. I've never taken that personally. That's part of our governmental process."

Madden began working for Franklin County on

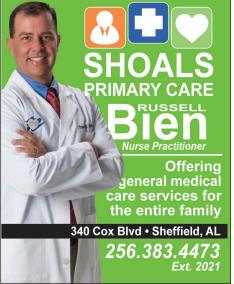
Madden began working for Franklin County on September 1, 1992, when she was hired as county accountant. She became assistant county administrator on October 1, 2005, and Franklin County probate judge Barry Moore appointed her county administrator on October 1, 2009.

She recently decided to step down after 25 years to accept the same position of county administrator for

ADDEN,' Page 9 Crista Madden











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Jerry Wayne Cotham, Phil Campbell, age 80 Died Wednesday, August 16, 2017. Funeral held at Pinkard Funeral Home in Russellville. Interment in Union Hill Cemetery.

Linda Darlene Echols, Russellville, age 57 Died Thursday, August 17, 2017. Memorial service held at Pinkard Funeral Home.

Mary Etna Garrison, Tuscumbia, age 87 Died Monday, August 14, 2017. Graveside service held at Hyde Cemetery in Littleville. Spry Memorial Chapel of Russellville assisted the family.

Raymond Arnold Hall, Russellville, age 82 Died Monday, August 21, 2017. Funeral arrangements had not been announced at press time. Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville was assisting the family.



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Large and in charge



The Franklin County Cattlemen's Association chapter was named the largest in the state during the 2017 membership year. Pictured above, from left, in front of their award are Richard Meadows, Alabama Cattlemen's Association president; Orland Britnell, ACA and Franklin County Cattlemen's past president; Jack Hargett, secretary/treasurer; and Steven Smith, Franklin County president.

Local Cattlemen take home statewide award

Submitted to the FFP

The Franklin County Cattlemen's Association chapter was named the largest in the state during the 2017 membership year, according to the Alabama

Each county across Alabama is hope to a Cattlemen's chapter. Franklin County finished the year with 582 members, followed by Limestone (502 members) and Lauderdale (350 members) counties.

To honor this achievement, the ACA awarded an outdoor tent and a "Beef, It's What's For Dinner" banner for use at county events.

"We appreciate the hard work of Franklin County's grassroots leaders and their efforts to recruit members on behalf of the association," ACA executive vice president Erin Beasley said. "It is our pleasure to reward a chapter as engaged and active as Franklin County. They are an inspiration to many counties in the state for their dedication to recruiting members."

The Franklin County Cattlemen's Association is led by president Steven Smith, Phil Campbell; vice president Caleb Beason, Russellville; and secretary/treasurer Jack Hargett, Spruce Pine. The leadership team is also backed by an actively involved board of directors.

Fire & Rescue Association seeks input on 911 Board

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

After receiving a letter from the Franklin County Fire & Rescue Squad Association asking that it be allowed to make recommendations on appointees to the Franklin County E911 Board, the Franklin County Commission failed to act on the association's request at its Monday meeting.

In a letter dated August 1, 2017, Franklin County Fire & Rescue Squad Association president John James requested that probate judge Barry Moore and the Franklin County Commission modify the appointment procedure for the seven-member E911 Board to allow the association to have input on two of the appointments.

See 'BOARD,' Page 10

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Honey Do: Just because

Today, I'm not writing about projects, maintenance, hardware or lawnmower issues, *just because*.

There is a special day coming up on August 27 (this Sunday) that, I think, bears mentioning. It is called "Just Because Day."

I couldn't find an origin for this "holiday," but I think it's a great idea. This is a great day to do something without a

I couldn't find an origin for "Just Because Day," but I think it's a great idea. This is a great day to do something without a reason--not because we are required to, expected to or told to. It's a day to act on a whim.

Go to a park and swing, call someone unexpectedly, turn a cart wheel, buy the guy's lunch in line behind you. The possibilities are endless.

reason--not because we are required to, expected to or told to. It's a day to act on a whim.

Go to a park and swing, call someone unexpectedly, turn a cart wheel, buy the guy's lunch in line behind you.



Doug Green

The possibilities are endless.

Just because.

I also found that August 27 is a "twofer" as special days go. Since 1994, it has been recognized as "Global Forgiveness Day."

Started by a Christian group in Canada, this is a day to forgive and be forgiven. Sounds like a timely idea, with all the crazy goings-on in the world, doesn't it?

Maybe it would be a good day to forgive someone "just because."

Anyway, have a great day, and remember, help is just around the corner at your local hardware store.

For updates on news and sports throughout the week, visit us on the web at www.franklinfreepress.net!

Send your guest columns, letters to the editor and other creative submissions to franklinfreepress@yahoo.com.



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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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PHOTO BY **JASON HILL**

students at Russellville Middle School took time on Monday to (carefully) view the solar eclipse.

The "Great American Eclipse" was visible within a band across the entire contiguous United States passing from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast. A total solar eclipse occurs when the moon's apparent diameter is larger than the sun's, blocking all direct sunlight, turning day into darkness. The previous time a total solar eclipse was visible across the entire contiguous United States was June 8, 1918, and not since the February

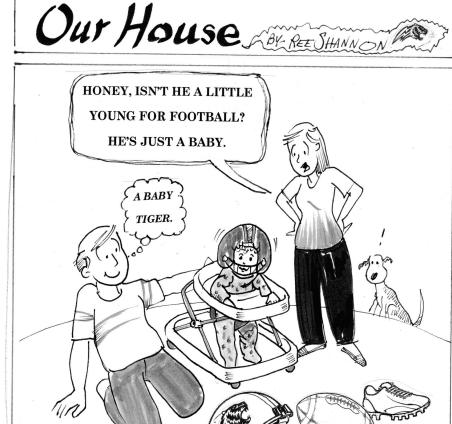
1979 eclipse has a

total eclipse been

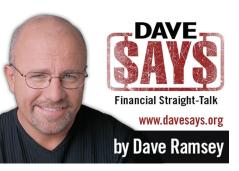
visible from anywhere in the

mainland U.S.





PAGE 5 AUGUST 23, 2017



Turn this into a blessing!

Dear Dave,

We're following your plan, and we're in the middle of paying off all our debts except for the house. My wife just learned she'll be losing her job at the end of the year. She's a project manager for a software company in Seattle, and she will be receiving a severance package if she works until year's end. We were curious as to how you think we should handle the next few months.

Kevin

Dear Kevin,

I know you guys are scared right now, but from what you've told me this could be the kind of thing that turns into a blessing. First, she should already be looking for another job to start right after her current employment ends. That way, any severance pay will turn into a signing bonus of sorts.

I know there are always question marks and uncertainties when you're job hunting, but this lady is a software project manager in Seattle, Washington. You're not in the middle of a cornfield, dude. If she can't find something in the next four to five months, there's some other issue you're not telling me about.

Now, in the very unlikely event she doesn't land another gig, you guys are going to have to put Baby Step 2 on hold for a while and cut your spending down to the bare necessities until something does come along. But your lady has a super-employable skill set. If she gets out there and really busts it looking for another job, I think you two are going to land on your feet and in even better shape than before!

Dave

Time to leave

Dear Dave.

My brother-in-law moved in with us several months ago. He's 32, and he doesn't have a job or contribute anything in terms of helping around the house or with bills. I think he needs to move out, but my wife is hesitant to say anything.

She complains about the situation to me, but she knows her family will be upset if we do anything. How can we handle this?

Chuck

Dear Chuck,

Responsible adults don't behave like bums, and I don't care what the rest of the family thinks. This issue is between you and your wife. You two are the only ones dealing with this, so it's easy for others to chime in about what should happen.

You shouldn't just kick the guy out, but you do need to get busy formulating a plan that will allow him to get back on his feet. Have a gentle talk with him about the situation and his future, and tell him things aren't going to continue on the same path. Let him know he must have a job within 30 days, and 30 days after that he has to move into his own place. Write it down on the calendar, if it will help, but make sure he understands *why* you're doing this and the date he must move out.

I know these things can be difficult, but sometimes you've got to take the bull by the horns and make something happen. It's what's best for him—and both of you—in the long run.

Dave

*Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including The Total Money Makeover. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 13 million listeners each week on 585 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.



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What's Happening

VENTS OF INTEREST • FAMILY RELINIONS • PLAYS • CHURCH GATHERINGS • EDUCATIONAL • CLUR MEETINGS

The Franklin County Extension Office will offer a six-class program on "Eating Smart, Being Active." The workshops will teach participants how to eat healthy, prepare meals and save money buying food. Classes are free and will include food demonstrations and tastings. The Extension Office will also offer a six-class program called "Today's Mom." The workshops will teach mothers-to-be how to have a healthy and safe pregnancy and learn about low-cost meals, pre-natal care, physical activity and breast feeding. For more information on these workshops, contact Lakita Page at 256-332-8880.

Gentiva Hospice offers a grief support group, "Grieving Well Together," that meets the fourth Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Lenox room at Calvary Baptist Church in Russellville. The next meeting will be held August 24. You are invited to attend.

Orange Baptist Church (8153 Hwy. 34, Russellville, AL 35654) will host a classic four-part harmony gospel singing with the group Unity Four from Iuka, MS this Saturday, August 26 at 6 p.m. Everyone is welcome!

The Borden and Roberts Reunion will be held this Sunday, August 27 at Mountain Valley Hee Haw off 243 on 79. Bring dish for dinner at noon. For more information, call 205-993-5680 or 256-810-4840.

TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) weight loss support group meets each Monday evening at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Recreation Center. Weigh-ins being at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop in for a free meeting visit. Call 256-446-5962 or 256-412-2855 for more information.

For anyone with the courage to be honest about life's hurts, habits and hang-ups, First United Methodist Church of Russellville will host Celebrate Recovery! on Tuesday nights with supper at 6 p.m., worship at 6:30 and groups at 7:30. Free childcare provided. The church is located at 311 North Jackson Avenue in downtown Russellville. Come and join us!

Learn about "Key Elements to Healthy Eating" at a free class on Wednesday, August 30. Class times are 11:30 a.m.-12 p.m. and 12-12:30 p.m. Classes will be held in the Franklin County Extension meeting room in the basement of the Franklin County Courthouse.

If you are interested in the study of the Civil War and have an ancestor who was in the Confederate Army, join the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Meetings are held the first Thursday of each month (except January and July) at 6 p.m. at the Russellville Rec Center. Next meeting will be September 7. The SCV is the direct heir of the United Confederate Veterans and the oldest hereditary organization for male descendants of Confederate soldiers. Organized at Richmond, VA in 1896, the SCV continues to serve as a historical, patriotic and non-political organization dedicated to ensuring that a true history of the period from 1861-1865 is preserved. Membership in the SCV is open to all male descendants of any veteran who served honorably in the Confederate Armed Forces. Membership can be obtained through either direct or collateral family lines, and kinship to a veteran must be documented genealogically. We hope you can join us for the celebration of our heritage! The minimum age for membership is 12. Call 1-800-MYDIXIE or 256-324-2317.

The Kerry Gilbert Band will perform a benefit concert with special guests James LeBlanc and Angela Hacker at the Roxy Theatre in downtown Russellville on Saturday, September 9 at 7 p.m. General admission seating. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children ages 6-12, and free for children under 6. Group discounts available! Call 256-335-4356. Profits go toward the renovation of the historic Roxy Theatre.

Revival will be held at Mars Hill Community Church (Hwy. 5 South in Phil Campbell) on September 10-15 with Sunday service at 5 p.m. and Monday-Friday services at 7 p.m. each night. Everyone is welcome!

The Russellville varsity cheerleaders will sponsor a Mini-Cheerleading Clinic at the West Elementary gym Monday, September 11 through Wednesday, September 13. Clinic will be from 3-5 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday and from 3-4:30 p.m. on Wednesday. Cost for three days is \$30. Performance date will be Friday, September 15 at Golden Tiger Stadium during the Russellville-Lawrence County football game. Deadline to register for the clinic is Friday, September 1! For more info, please call Russellville cheer coach Stephanie Mayfield at 256-810-7067.

A merican Legion Post 64 meets the second Thursday of each month at the Chamber of Commerce office on Jackson Avenue. Meal served around 6 p.m., meeting at 7 p.m. Next meeting will be Thursday, September 14.

The Bay Tree Council for the Performing Arts in Red Bay announces its 2017-2018 season. The first production will be *In-laws, Outlaws and other People (That Should be Shot)* by Steve Franco, November 9-12, 2017. The second production will be *One Toe in the Grave* by Jack Starkey, with dinner theatre available, February 15-18, 2018. The final production will be *Southern Hospitality* by Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten, April 26-29, 2018. All performances will be at Community Spirit Bank's Weatherford Centre in Red Bay, with evening performances beginning at 7 p.m. and Sunday afternoon performances at 2 p.m. Admission is \$8.00, and tickets go on sale the Monday prior to the week of the production. Groups interested in dinner with the play may contact Beth Hammock at 256-356-9286 to reserve in advance. BTCPA is known for doing quality comedy plays suitable for the whole family.

AUGUST 23, 2017
AUGUST 23, 2017

that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from co-workers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk." (Page 22, Gentry complaint).

Russellville city attorney Danny McDowell, when reached for comment last week, issued a brief statement:

"Our policy remains that we will not comment on pending litigation. However, I can state affirmatively we continue to feel very confident about the city's position in these legal proceedings," McDowell said.

Gentry filed two separate charges of discrimination

with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission related to her employment with the City of Russellville. The first was filed on March 24, 2016, with a second complaint filed April 27, 2017. In Gentry's second complaint, she maintains she was "constructively discharged in retaliation for opposing discriminatory conduct in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended."

In that charge of discrimination, Gentry alleged the following: I am a former female employee of Russellville Police Department. I have previously filed charges of discrimination against the City of Russellville, and am currently involved in litigation with the City. On or about February 24, 2017, a member of the Russellville City Council asked me to request a meeting with the council to discuss my workplace issues. On or about March 6, 2017, I went to a City Council meeting and discussed what I perceive to be ongoing discriminatory conduct by my superiors in the police department. On March 8, 2017, I was called into the station on my day off and informed to bring all police department equipment with me. At that time I

'LAWSUIT,' from page 1

was given the choice to resign or be terminated. I wrote a letter of resignation while at this meeting."

After an investigation, the EEOC issued a "Dismissal and Notice of Rights," as it did following Gentry's first complaint, indicating that "based upon its investigation, the EEOC is unable to conclude that the information obtained establishes violations of the statutes. This does not certify that the respondent is in compliance with the statutes. No finding is made as to any other issues that might be construed as having been raised by this charge."

The City of Russellville, through the law firm of Lanier, Ford, Shaver & Payne, P.C., of Huntsville, filed an answer denying each allegation of Gentry's complaint, including the specific affirmative defense that "Plaintiff's gender was not a substantial or motivating factor for any of the city's employment actions, practices or decisions."

"Our policy remains that we will not comment on pending litigation. However, I can state affirmatively we continue to feel very confident about the city's position in these legal proceedings," McDowell said.

Essentially, the EEOC once again closed its file on the matter after being unable to find evidence that statutes were violated. This finding does not prevent Gentry from filing a lawsuit, which she did again last month. The City of Russellville, through the law firm of Lanier, Ford, Shaver & Payne, P.C., of Huntsville, filed an answer denying each allegation of Gentry's complaint, including the specific affirmative defense that "Plaintiff's gender was not a substantial or motivating factor for any of the city's employment actions, practices or decisions."

In her initial lawsuit, Gentry alleges she was told by a fellow sergeant that "women have no place in law enforcement." Additionally, she claims she was subjected to a Field Training program for new sergeants that didn't exist before her promotion, and that she was not provided with a computer program designed for supervisors to view their officers' locations through GPS.

In the new lawsuit, Gentry asserts her husband, Mickey Gentry, a city employee in the Russellville Fire Department, spoke with mayor David Grissom about the discrimination and harassment his wife was enduring, and that a police captain told Gentry he needed to keep his mouth shut, removed him from the RPD Reserve Officer program and told him he was not welcome on police department premises unless he had official business.

Gentry's complaint further alleges she was "followed and verbally harassed" by a sergeant within the department and that while she was pregnant she was not allowed to use sick leave donated to her by other employees.

The first lawsuit is pending in the court of United States District Judge Madeline Hughes Haikala and is set for a status conference in January of 2018. No trial date has been set and no decision has come from the court on Gentry's motion to consolidate the two cases.

'MADDEN,' from page 1

Chilton County. Madden will start her new job in Clanton on October 1, 2017.

"It wasn't an opportunity I was seeking," she said. "I was online looking at the ACCA [Association of County Commissions of Alabama] and saw the position advertised. I sent a resume and thought I'd see what happens. They called me for an interview and offered me the job. It was an increase in pay and a career opportunity I couldn't let pass by."

It wasn't a hastily made decision for Madden. She and her husband Jeff, an assistant principal at Muscle Shoals High School, have two children attending the University of North Alabama. Their son Kody will be a senior, and their daughter Darby, who earned a basketball scholarship, will be a freshman.

"I'll live in Clanton during the week and have weekend visitation with the family," Madden said. "And yes, Jeff and I are very happily married. This was not an easy decision because I have to move and reside there. But long-term this is the best decision for our family and one made by the entire family.

"I'm excited about the next phase of my life. We'll move Darby to UNA this weekend, and then I'll move next weekend."

The public is invited to a farewell party honoring Madden and her 25 years of service to Franklin County on Tuesday, August 29 from 3-4:30 p.m. in the Franklin County Commission Office conference room.

Unlike other positions in the commission office, the county administrator is appointed at the pleasure of the probate judge, who serves as chairman of the Franklin County Commission. Moore said he will not immediately appoint a replacement for Madden, and her duties will be assumed collectively by Leah Mansell, Mandi Willis, Jessica Thompson and Kim Brooks.

"We're not going to fill that position at this time," Moore said. "The staff will work together and divide her duties among them. We have a very good staff of

ladies in the commission office, and we'll work together and move forward.

"Crista has been here twenty-five years, and we appreciate her service to Franklin County. She will be greatly missed. It's hard to replace twenty-five years of service"

Other than one year when she worked for Dependable True Value Service Center in Russellville, Madden's entire professional career has been with Franklin County. She graduated from UNA in May of 1991 with a degree in Accounting. Madden, whose father Rayburn Massey is in his third term as Franklin County Commissioner for District Three, has lived her entire life in the Dempsey community of Franklin County. She is a 1987 graduate of Red Bay High School.

"Crista has been here twenty-five years, and we appreciate her service to Franklin County," said Barry Moore, one of four probate judges Madden worked for. "She will be greatly missed. It's hard to replace twenty-five years of service."

"I wasn't real happy to begin with when my dad decided to enter the political arena, but we've been able to separate that from our relationship as father-daughter," Madden said. "At first, maybe we talked politics but we soon realized everyone else eventually left the table but us."

Madden signed a four-year contract with Chilton County, and she'll stay there during the week. But she'll always consider Franklin County as home.

"This is my home," she said. "Being away from my family will be a challenge. Another challenge is leaving the girls and staff here. They're like family to me. I'm not running from anything here. I have a great job and work with some wonderful people. I have great relationships with the department heads and elected offi-

cials. It's just an opportunity I felt I couldn't pass by, and it's a good time in my life and career to do this."

Madden's tenure in Franklin County saw her work for four probate judges: Larry Jackson, Hal Kirby, Mike Green and Moore.

"One thing I learned early in this position is you can't be political," Madden said. "You have to maintain neutrality and keep your political views to yourself. I always tell the girls our jobs are the same, and it doesn't matter who is in elected office. I always separated work from politics. I respect all of the political officials I've worked for and with. I've worked with some great people

"Judge Moore was the chairman who appointed me to county administrator. I've enjoyed working with him. He's very thorough, and you never have to worry if we're doing something we shouldn't be. I appreciate his support and the opportunity he's given me."

During her interview process with Chilton County, Madden was up front about her close family relationship and her desire to watch as many of her daughter's college basketball games as possible.

"They included that in the email they sent to me offering the job," she said. "I sat down with the kids and let them read that, and it gave them peace of mind. The kids have been so supportive and encouraging about this. That made it easier. It's difficult for Jeff as well. His wife and daughter are moving out within a few days of each other, so he and Kody will hold down the fort."

Madden knows her last day working in Franklin County won't be easy, but she believes she made the best decision for her family.

"Definitely, what I'll miss most are the relationships I've built here," she said. "I'm only going to be one phone call away, and they'll only be a phone call away too. I know when I leave here things will be fine because I'm leaving this office in very capable hands."

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'BOARD,' from page 3

"Our association is made up of all the fire departments, rescue squads and ambulance services in Franklin County," the letter read. "As such, this makes us the largest user of the 911/Dispatch system. However, we have no direct connection to the board, who makes all the policies and decisions as it relates to 911 call taking and dispatch. We acknowledge that currently there are a couple of the 911 board members that serve in some of our departments, but we also understand that the appointments of these individuals are at the commission's discretion. We want to assure that we have a voice on the board in the future."

Currently, the seven-member E911 Board includes two appointees from three of the four commission districts and one appointee from District Four. Members include Doug Hatton and Harlon Hutcheson (District One), Chris Hargett and Mike Mayfield (District Two), sheriff Shannon Oliver and chairman Roy Gober (District Three), and Jim Berry (District Four).

Although Oliver officially serves on the board, the sheriff is allowed to appoint a designee, so Oliver appointed Brandon James in his place.

John James wanted the commission to allow his association a voice in determining one or two E911 board members since the association members receive the majority of 911 calls.

The association includes 20 emergency response agencies. Only the three municipal police departments and the Franklin County Sheriff's Department are not members. Among the association's members are Keller Ambulance Service, the Russellville Fire Department and all volunteer fire departments in Franklin County, along with the Phil Campbell Rescue Squad and all volunteer rescue squads.

We don't have a true voice on the board," James said. "There are a couple people who by commission appointment are members of volunteer fire departments, but what if the commissioners chose not to reappoint them? At some point those individuals may not want to serve or the commission may choose not to re-

"They are worried about each commissioner representing their district. That's not what this is about. To me, it's about having people on there who use the sys-

tem and make sure the system is doing what it needs to do to help emergency services and the people who call in and use it."

40 Years of Experience

Commissioners noted that two of the seven E911 Board members are already associated with volunteer fire departments, including Gober and Hutcheson. Hatton has also been a part of the Tharptown Volunteer

James questioned how Brandon James, who serves as 911 Administrator and is paid through the E911 Board, could serve as a board member of an agency that pays

Last year, commissioners voted to add the Franklin County Emergency Management Agency director as a permanent member of the E911 Board. That action was later nullified after it was determined to be inconsistent with Alabama state law.

John James, who attended Monday's commission meeting, said the E911 Board had recently purchased a new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system with taxpayer funds, but the fire departments had no input on the system or how it would be used.

Passion for kids leads Gunderman back to classroom

Franklin Free Pres

"Every child you pass in the hall has a story that needs to be heard. Maybe you are the one meant to hear it." — Bethany Hill

When Amy Gunderman accepted the job as Franklin County Schools Child Nutrition Program director six years ago, it was a logical career path move. She would work at the central office and received a significant

From the time Gunderman left her teaching position at Phil Campbell High School, where she taught Family and Consumer Sciences, she felt a void being disconnected from her students. That void continued until this fall when Gunderman returned to the classroom at PCHS after stepping down from the CNP Director position, a move that cost her \$17,000 a year in salary.

But for the Phil Campbell native, teaching has never been about the money.

"At the time Mr. [Gary] Williams asked me about coming to be the CNP director, it was December of 2011, right after the tornado," Gunderman said. 'Almost right away, I wished I had stayed in teaching. I missed the kids and wanted to be back in school, but there wasn't an opportunity."

That opportunity came this summer after the Family and Consumer Sciences teacher at Phil Campbell retired. With two children enrolled at Phil Campbell (one in fifth grade and one in 11th grade), Gunderman applied for her old position, and earlier this month she returned to the classroom.

A teacher since 1994, Gunderman was back where she belonged—teaching on a daily basis.

"I've always loved and enjoyed kids," she said. "I felt if I took the Child Nutrition Program director job, I'd be able to reach more kids and help more children. But when I got into the job and realized how many government restrictions were put on child nutrition, there was so much paperwork, that was really all I was doing.

"I didn't have much chance to get out and teach many nutrition lessons and interact with kids like I wanted to do. I wanted to do more nutrition education, but there just wasn't time with all the regulations involved in that

Franklin County superintendent of education Greg Hamilton said he hated to lose his CNP director, but he appreciates Gunderman's passion in wanting to return to the classroom.

"Amy Gunderman has done a great job as the CNP director the last several years," Hamilton said. "Her love for teaching children has ultimately led her back to the classroom. I commend her for what she does for our school system.'

Gunderman is a 1990 graduate of Phil Campbell High. She earned her undergraduate degree in Secondary Home Economics Education from the University of Montevallo in 1994. Her husband Gary is a teacher at Tharptown High School.

Gunderman's teaching career includes stops at Austin High School, Haleyville, Mt. Hope and Phil Campbell. She will continue to serve as CNP director until a permanent hire is made this fall.

"It was important to spend time with my kids," Gunderman said. "Lara is in fifth grade, and Anna Beth in 11th grade. Leah is in her second year at Northwest-Shoals Community College. I really feel like we're put on earth to make a difference, and I didn't feel like I was making a difference in that CNP job.

"The saying I want on my tombstone a hundred years from now is that it doesn't matter what's in your bank account or what house you lived in, but whether you were important in the life of a child. I missed that. I felt I wasn't making a difference in the lives of children."

In just two weeks of school, Gunderman said her

experiences with her students have reinforced that she made the right decision in returning to the classroom.

"Every day it's something different," she said. "I had a seventh-grade girl come in one day crying because she was lost and couldn't find her class. Different things happen every day. Kids come talk to you, and I realize I did the right thing in coming back.'

She is teaching four classes, including food and nutrition, seventh-grade teen connections, and housing and interior design. And her daughter is in her first period class, so that's another perk of returning to PCHS.

The biggest difference for Gunderman is the new school. When she left in 2011, classes were being held in portable units and at local churches.

"It's a really nice school," she said. "It's nice not to have to worry about roof leaks and things like that. The facilities are very nice. With me being at the old school and coming back to this, it makes me very appreciative of what we have. The whole time I went to school at Phil Campbell, we didn't have air conditioning. I know what it's like to have a swimming pool in the classroom because the roof is leaking.

"I tell my kids all the time how wonderful their school is and how thankful we should be. The kids are very appreciative, too. There's no litter on the ground. They respect the school. There's no writing on the bathroom walls. It's great to see the students genuinely proud of their school."



COURTESY PHOTO

HEAD OF THE CLASS - Amy Gunderman has returned to teaching at PCHS.

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Over/under win totals in the SEC

Mike Self Franklin Free Press

The college football season officially kicks off Saturday [SEC fans have to wait another week], so now's our last chance to make a few predictions. The Bovada Sportsbook in Las Vegas released over-under win totals (regular season only) for every team in the country last month. We'll give you our take on where the 14 SEC teams will finish in 2017.

Alabama

Bovada Win Total: 10.5 FFP Prediction: Over

Alabama has won at least 11 games in the regular season six years running, and I see no reason why that streak should end in 2017. The Tide essentially faces a three-game schedule this year: September 1 vs. Florida State (in Atlanta), November 4 vs. LSU and November 25 at Auburn. A loss anywhere else on the schedule seems inconceivable, and Alabama would have to drop two of those three to fall short of the mark.

Not likely.

LSU Payada V

Bovada Win Total: 9 FFP Prediction: Under

I'm hedging my bets on the Tigers, who will most likely be without stud pass-rusher Arden Key in their opener against BYU. Key's health is an issue; so, too, is the passing game, not to mention a schedule that features five road games in conference play—including trips to Gainesville, Tuscaloosa and Knoxville.

Too many question marks to expect 10 wins.

Auburn

Bovada Win Total: 8.5 FFP Prediction: Over

I'm not buying Clemson as a national title contender this season; Deshaun Watsons simply don't grow on trees. If Auburn can upset the reigning champs on the road on September 9, then a 6-0 start looks entirely plausible. The schedule toughens down the stretch, starting with a trip to Baton Rouge in mid-October and then finishing with home games against Georgia and Alabama in November. As long as the Tigers don't lose all three of those [they haven't beat LSU on the road since 1999 and haven't beaten Georgia or Alabama anywhere since 2013], they should get to nine wins—assuming Jarrett Stidham is the answer they've been looking for at quarterback.

Georgia

Bovada Win Total: 8.5 FFP Prediction: Over

Virtually the entire defense is back for the Bulldogs, and Jacob Eason is bound to be more

See 'SEC,' page 15

Let's get physical

Red Bay, Colbert Heights preparing for 'toughness contest' in Week 1 clash

Mike Self Franklin Free Press

For any head coach preparing his team to play in a season-opening game, there is always an element of uncertainty.

"For the first game, you do what you can preparationwise based on what your opponent did last year," said Colbert Heights coach Taylor Leathers, whose team will kick off the 2017 regular season on Friday at home against veteran coach Michael Jackson and Red Bay. "But you never know what you might see. Based on what they've done in the past, we know Coach Jackson likes to run the ball. As far as what formations they'll run...who knows?"

Suppressing a grin, Leathers added, "They might come out in the spread."

Not likely.

Jackson has won a lot of football games (99 of them,

See 'PHYSICAL,' page 16



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Red Bay's Michael Jackson is one win shy of 100 for his career as a high school head coach heading into Friday's season opener at Colbert Heights. The Tigers have beaten the Wildcats six straight times, including a 33-26 win at home last year.

Heaton, Golden Tigers hoping two quarterbacks are better than one

Mike Self Franklin Free Press

Mark Heaton has been a head football coach at the high school level for a decade now, so he's seen his share of quarterback battles.

The competition this year at Russellville between junior Devin Buckhalter and freshman Luke Barnwell, however, is different in at least one respect.

"I've been through these situations before," said Heaton, who is 27-9 in three seasons with the Golden Tigers. "I've been in a situation where a kid came on as a freshman late in the year and forced that same scenario. I've had situations plenty of times where guys were battling for a position, and every one of them is unique.

"The difference here is, I've never been in a situation where one of those guys was your leading receiver the previous year."

Such is the case with Buckhalter, who broke out as a sophomore in 2016 with a team-high 35 catches for 514 yards as an outside receiver. He also served as the primary backup to veteran quarterback Payton Nichols, who graduated in May after three seasons as Russellville's starter.

Buckhalter played quarterback for the first two quarters of the spring game against Saks in May, demonstrating his dynamic running ability and also hooking up with senior Bernard Phinizee on a 34-yard touchdown pass. Barnwell, more of a pure pocket passer, took all the snaps in the third quarter and led the Golden Tigers on a long scoring drive—which he capped off with a 26-yard touchdown toss to

See 'HEATON,' page 18



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

Freshman Luke Barnwell (above) is expected to split reps with junior Devin Buckhalter at quarterback for Russellville this year. The Golden Tigers will travel to Athens for a preseason game on Friday night before opening the regular season at Deshler on September 1.



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MLBPAA set to host youth baseball clinic in Red Bay

John Pilati Franklin Free Press

For the first time ever, the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association (MLBPAA) will host a free youth baseball clinic in Alabama, and Red Bay will be the host city. Details were announced last Monday that the city of Red Bay would host the "Legends for Youth" clinic on Saturday, October 28 from 9 a.m.-noon at the Red Bay Dixie Youth Baseball Field.

Red Bay High School varsity baseball coach Richard Maggerise will take the lead in organizing the event, which will include kids from across Franklin, Colbert, Lauderdale and Marion counties. Up to 150 youth are eligible to participate in the free clinic.

The "Legends for Youth" are coming to Franklin County through the organizational efforts of former Kansas City Royals pitcher Randy McGilberry. McGilberry met Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow (D-Red Bay) in Montgomery while McGilberry was in Montgomery during debate on Senate Bill 302, the Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative Act.

McGilberry's son Seth is a corrections officer at St. Clair Correctional Facility who was stabbed in the line of duty last year. Though his son recovered, McGilberry maintains an active role in the Alabama Correction Officers Association, where he serves as president.

McGilberry and Morrow became friends, and Morrow and his wife Martha invited McGilberry and his wife to spend the weekend in Franklin County last week. The two met with Maggerise, Red Bay mayor Charlene Fancher, Troy Rutland from the Cherokee Park and Recreation Department, Dean Hubbard from Red Bay Park and Rec, and Tony Shackelford, a former baseball coach at Northwest-Shoals Community College.

"When Johnny Mack found out I played major league baseball and our alumni association does these camps," McGilberry said, "he asked, 'How can we get a camp in this area?' As a kid growing up in Saraland, Alabama, we never had any opportunities like this to deal with people from the big leagues or even the college level. We just played ball by the seat of our pants. We're trying now to give back to communities through guys who have made it and give kids who otherwise might not have these opportunities the opportunity to take part. Lots of kids will come to this camp who, if they had to pay to go to camp, wouldn't be there."

The "Legends for Youth" are coming to Franklin County through the efforts of former Kansas City Royals pitcher Randy McGilberry.

"First and foremost, it's about kids and creating opportunities for them," Red Bay mayor Charlene Fancher said. "I love what Randy said about the program. It's not only teaching baseball technique, but helping these kids in life make the right choices."

McGilberry said the clinic will be for kids of all ages and skill levels. Registration will be coordinated through the host city of Red Bay.

There are approximately 8,000 living major league baseball players. McGilberry will work to get some alumni from this area involved in the clinic, like Josh Willingham and Jon Lieber of Alabama.

"We plan for this to be the first of many years of camps here in Red Bay," Morrow said, "so if a child isn't chosen this year, he or she will have the opportunity next year. Where better to start this program in Alabama than Franklin County?"

Fancher said she was impressed with McGilberry when she sat down with him and learned about the Legends for Youth program.

"First and foremost, it's about kids and creating opportunities for them," Fancher said. "I love what Randy said about the program. It's not only teaching baseball technique, but helping these kids in life make the right choices.

"Any time we have the opportunity in Red Bay to host an event that benefits children, we welcome the opportunity."

The Legends for Youth clinics began in 1996. Last year, major league alumni held more than 150 clinics for more than 16,500 children. According to "Legends for Youth," its three-fold mission is:

- •To provide a fun, positive baseball experience.
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 - •To teach young ballplayers the game's fundamentals in a multi-station format.

A typical clinic sees around 150 kids with seven or eight coaches. Kids rotate through eight stations that include instruction on base running, throwing, outfield play, hitting, bunting, pitching, infield, catching and life skills. An autograph session takes place at the end of the clinic.

For more information on the Legends for Youth program, log onto www.mlbpaa.mlb.com.



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'SEC', from page 13

consistent week to week as a sophomore. There are nine wins on that schedule—at least.

Florida

Bovada Win Total: 8 FFP Prediction: Under

Eight also happens to be the number of defensive players Florida lost from last season, most all of whom are now in the NFL. Factor in the season-ending injury to All-SEC safety Marcel Harris in fall practice and the suspension of seven players—including top receiver Antonio Callaway—for the opener against Michigan, and I'm leaning more toward seven wins than nine.

Tennessee

Bovada Win Total: 7.5 FFP Prediction: Under

Last year's UT team barely reached eight wins in the regular season, and that was before guys like Josh Dobbs, Alvin Kamara, Josh Malone and Derek Barnett left town. With no experience at quarterback and no defensive players receiving preseason All-SEC honors this year, I think Tennessee gets done in by an improving SEC East division—not to mention crossover games with Alabama and LSU from the West.

Texas A&M

Bovada Win Total: 7 FFP Prediction: Over

The schedule sets up nicely for another fast start—particularly if the Aggies win the opener at UCLA. If they don't, then eight wins might be a stretch, unless they can knock off one of the consensus top three teams in the West. The real question might be whether

or not eight wins will even be enough for Kevin Sumlin to avoid the chopping block.

Kentucky

Bovada Win Total: 7 FFP Prediction: Over

The Wildcats hit this number on the nose last year, and in theory they should be better in 2017. Sixteen starters are back, and now is a great time to catch both Mississippi teams in cross-divisional play.

One potential issue: Swing games against South Carolina, Mississippi State and Vanderbilt (all home wins last season) are on the road this time. Best not lose that opener to Southern Miss again.

Arkansas

Bovada Win Total: 7 FFP Prediction: Under

Arkansas was by many measures the worst defensive team in the league last year, and now they lose four of their top five receivers and their All-Conference running back on offense. A brutal schedule (10 games in 10 weeks, including eight in conference play, following an early-season bye) doesn't help matters.

Missouri

Bovada Win Total: 6.5 FFP Prediction: Under

Two of Missouri's four wins last year came against creampuffs Eastern Michigan and Delaware State. Are the Tigers—who had major problems on defense last year and struggled to score points in SEC play—really going to improve by three wins this season? I don't see it

Vanderbilt

Bovada Win Total: 6 FFP Prediction: Under

Seven wins might be out of the question following a brutal early-season stretch of games against K-State, Alabama, Florida and Georgia in a four-week span. Vandy will be fortunate this season to make it back to a bowl game.

Ole Miss

Bovada Win Total: 5.5 FFP Prediction: Under

Tough to get a handle on this year, but under seems like the safe play. There is talent, but the off-season has been a complete circus, and the schedule is unforgiving—especially early, with three of the first four SEC games against Alabama, Auburn and LSU.

Mississippi State Bovada Win Total: 5.5 FFP Prediction: Over

Give Dan Mullen a *little* credit. He's taken the Bulldogs bowling in each of the past seven seasons. The September schedule (LSU, Georgia, Auburn) is a killer, but after that things soften up considerably.

South Carolina

Bovada Win Total: 5.5 FFP Prediction: Over

No way South Carolina belongs on the bottom of this list. They have a rising star at quarterback in Jake Bentley and some big-time weapons for him to throw to. If they improve at running the football and stopping the run, the Gamecocks will breeze past this number and might crack the top three in the East.











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'PHYSICAL,' from page 13

to be exact) in 15 years as a head coach by adhering to the same tried-and-true formula: Be physical, play great defense and run the football. Leathers, now in his second season at Colbert Heights, expects to see more of the same on Friday night when the Tigers visit Amos Mitchell Stadium.

"Red Bay always plays physical," he said. "They line up foot-to-foot, put their hand down and come right at you. Looking at last year's film, we saw a lot of Power-I, a lot of double-tight, which to me means two fullbacks offset with a tailback. They like to run the lead and the power. They like to go knee-to-knee and toe-to-toe and find out if you can stop them. It's good, old-fashioned football.

"It'll be a toughness contest."

Last season at Red Bay, the Tigers withstood an hour-long weather delay in the first half and a Colbert Heights rally in the second half to beat the Wildcats 33-26 on a last-minute 38-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Kolby Bragwell to tight end Max Bullen. Both those players are back this season, but Red Bay is looking to replace seven starters on both sides of the ball from a team that finished 8-3 a year ago.

Jackson expects as many as four freshmen and four sophomores to play key roles this year, and nine players will be making their first career varsity start on Friday night in Tuscumbia.

"We'll have to execute well," said Jackson, who is 28-6 in three seasons at Red Bay and 99-68 overall as a head coach. "The last two years, we haven't executed very well in the first game of the year. Our execution hasn't been as good in that Colbert Heights game as it has the rest of the season.

"Red Bay always plays physical," Leathers said. "They line up footto-foot, put their hand down and come right at you. It's good, oldfashioned football. It'll be a toughness contest."

"We have nine guys who will be starting their first game ever, so we are a little young. But I know these guys like to compete, and I know they've worked extremely hard. Now it's just a matter of them being in that atmosphere for the first time and being able to make the right decisions."

While those young players get acclimated to the Friday-night lights, Jackson said it's imperative that players like Bragwell (a 6'2, 195-pound junior entering his second season as the starting quarterback), Bullen (a 6'2, 188-pound senior with gamechanging speed and athleticism), right tackle Hunter Tyler (a 6'3, 320-pound senior who has started since he was a freshman), senior tailback Aaron Lewey (who has four career 100-yard rushing games) and lineman Elijah Ingle (a 240-pound junior who starts at left guard and defensive tackle) step up and set the tone.

"We need our more experienced players to really step up and be great leaders for us," Jackson said. "We only have eight seniors, but a lot of those guys have played a lot of football games. They have that experience, and we're counting on them."

The Wildcats, coming off their fourth consecutive 4-6 season, are relying on a few key veterans of their own. Quarterback Kevin Shaw was named the team's Offensive MVP as a junior in 2016 after rushing for more than 700 yards and 12 touchdowns in his first season as the starter. Linebacker Korey Saint (a 6'2, 200-pound senior) had a huge game against Red Bay last season, making six tackles, intercepting a pass and returning a fumble for a touchdown. He's back to anchor a linebacker unit that also includes fellow seniors Brendan Borden, Bevin Foust and Dylan Chandler.

"Colbert Heights has good depth," Jackson said, "and that should play to their advantage in Week One. They have sixteen to eighteen seniors; they have more seniors on their roster than we have juniors *and* seniors on ours. They have a very explosive quarterback who is hard to handle. We'll have to tackle him in space. They make you play disciplined defense with some of the option stuff they do.

"They also have some key returning guys on defense, guys who had big games against us last year. We'll have to figure out a way to neutralize them."

Saint and company bring plenty of experience and play-making ability to the line-backer spot, but the Wildcats are reloading on the defensive line following the graduation of standouts like Carson Peoples and Justin Roberts. The front four of tackles Cain Phifer and Dalton Davis and ends Tyler Tubbs and Bud Pratt will be tested right out of the gate by Red Bay's ground-and-pound style.

"We're not really big up front, on either side of the ball," Leathers said. "Red Bay usually has a big offensive line, but we're hoping to use our quickness to our advantage. We don't have as much experience on our defensive line, but I don't necessarily think we're at a disadvantage in that area. I'm looking forward to seeing how those guys step up and respond in the heat of battle."

Holding up in the trenches was tops on the list of Leathers' keys for Friday night, when the Wildcats will be looking to snap a six-game losing skid in their series with Red Bay.

"Physicality is number one," he said. "It'll be a line-of-scrimmage game. Whoever can dominate at the line of scrimmage will win. The second thing is ball security. That's always a big key, especially early in the season. And I think a third key will be the kicking game and special teams—punt return, kickoff return, all of those things.

"We'll have to be sharp on offense, play physical and tackle well on the other side

'PHYSICAL', from page 16

of the ball."

Sound tackling will be key for the Tigers as well, particularly when it comes to getting the speedy and elusive Shaw on the ground. But Leathers believes that his senior quarterback's ability to make good decisions will be just as critical on Friday night as his ability to make plays.

"Kevin's a second-year starter now, a senior," Leathers said. "He has ten games of experience. His decision-making will be a big key, just making the right read—in the run game and in the pass game. Our goal is to try and be right on everything, to make the right read and to put the ball in the right place.

"Leadership is the second big thing we need from him. Last year, going into that first game at Red Bay, Kevin had never really commanded a huddle before. We're looking for him to lead verbally and by example, to get guys in gear when they need it and the coach isn't out there to do it. He has to be the coach on the field."

As for the coaches on the sidelines Friday night, one of them is on the verge of a career milestone. Jackson's next win will be his 100th as a high school head coach—an impressive achievement, to be sure, but not a topic of discussion for his team heading into the season opener.

"We don't really talk about it at all," Jackson said Sunday night. "I'm sure [the players] know about it, because they read the paper and stuff. But all I want them thinking about on Friday night is going out and executing and staying focused on the task at hand."

As a young head coach in only his second year running a program, Leathers appreciates the magnitude of getting to 100 career wins—even if he would prefer to see Jackson reach the mark *next* week.

"That's definitely an accomplishment to be proud of," Leathers said. "Coach Jackson has had a great career. It would be great to see him get there....in Week Two."

On the verge of hitting the century mark, Jackson still remembers his first career win as a varsity head coach—a 39-6 rout of Madison County in the final game of his first season at Buckhorn High School back in 2002. His second career win, a 21-18 victory over Bradshaw High in the 2003 season opener at Buckhorn,



PHOTO BY KYLE GLASGOW

TO THE MAX - Bullen, who caught the gamewinning touchdown pass in the final minute of last season's 33-26 victory over Colbert Heights, is one of only eight seniors on Red Bay's roster this season. Nine players for the Tigers will be making their first career start on Friday night at Amos Mitchell Stadium.

stands out even more vividly.

You might even say it's permanently etched in the, ahem, *fabric* of time.

"I remember my second win more," Jackson said, "because I split my pants right after the game. I split my pants during the celebration. My wife kept those pants, too. I still have them to this day."



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'HEATON' from page 13

The two continued to split reps throughout the off-season, but toward the end of the summer the focus shifted toward getting the less experienced Barnwell as much work as possible. The freshman took every snap at the Northwest Alabama 7-on-7 in late July, completing 63-of-100 passes with 15 touchdowns and four interceptions while leading Russellville to six wins in seven games.

The more rapidly Barnwell progresses, the sooner Buckhalter can go back to terrorizing defensive backs with his 4.68 speed, 36-inch vertical and outstanding body control. For now, though, it appears to be a legitimate two-quarterback system, with Buckhalter slated to start Friday's preseason game at Athens.

"We'll start Devin right out of the gate that first series and go from there," Heaton said Monday morning. "It's not one of those things where we want each guy to get a certain amount of reps. It's more about us preparing for how we're gonna handle it in the regular season, which will be based on what the situation dictates. We know what these guys do well, and it's our job when we get in those situations to make sure we've got the right guy taking the snaps.

"We want to handle it the right way and be transparent with the kids. I think that's one of the great things about the situation we have—both kids are tremendous men and selfless guys who are ready to do what's best for the team. That makes it a lot easier, just knowing they've got confidence and trust in you to put them in the right spots. Their teammates see that, too, and it makes it easier. This will be something we handle week to week as we grow.'

Heaton said the team-wide plan for Friday's preseason game will be for the varsity to play the entire first half and then one additional series on each side of the ball

"From there, we'll start rotating jayvee guys and working them in," said Heaton, whose team will kick off the regular season on September 1 at Deshler. "Athens will have higher numbers than we do, so they may run some of their two's and stuff like that [in the third quarter]. We'll play some two's right after that as well, but by the fourth quarter we're gonna try and spend the majority of that time working in our jayvee guys.'

The Golden Tigers are replacing as many as eight offensive starters from a year ago, along with a handful of key defenders, so there have been plenty of position battles taking place throughout the summer and into fall camp. Heaton said Friday's game at Athens will provide an excellent opportunity for he and his staff to evaluate their personnel in a live-game setting.

"We've got a lot of guys pushing for playing time, and this will give us one last chance to get a feel for things," Heaton said. "It's a great opportunity for guys to solidify how much they're gonna be on the field at different times. We'll also be able to evaluate special teams, even though we're not going live with it. We'll get the chance to run through it, at least, and see how crisp we are with it.

'That's one of the great things about the situation we have—both kids are tremendous men and selfless guys who are ready to do what's best for the team," Heaton said. "That makes it a lot easier, knowing they've got confidence and trust in you to put them in the right spots. Their teammates see that, too, and it makes it easier.'

"This should be a really great opportunity to be able to compete in a game atmosphere. The adrenaline is always higher, and that in itself takes the conditioning aspect of things to another level."

As the Golden Tigers transitioned from fall-camp mode into game-week mode with their Sunday afternoon lift session, film study and install meetings, Heaton said he thought the second week of fall practice went "really well."

"The energy level was really high," he said. "I think we got better every day, which is what we wanted to see. We made progress every day. The kids got a better feel of what we're trying to do. We're starting to see what guys in what spots are really gonna be able to help us, as far as the different personnel groupings we'll be using in certain situations. That picture is starting to come together more clearly, and it will really work itself out a lot on Friday night.'

If nothing else, Friday's trip to Athens will give the Golden Tigers a chance to start getting accustomed to life on the road. Once the regular season starts, five of Russellville's first six games will be away from home: At Deshler, at Lee-Huntsville, at Mae Jemison, at Hartselle and at St. John Paul II.

"A lot of it is the attitude you approach it with," Heaton said of the road-heavy schedule. "We don't talk about that. We treat every game the same, every week of preparation the same. We don't spend much time at all talking about our opponent. Our focus is on us and what we need to do to compete at a high level.

"Road and home is irrelevant. There's a job that needs to be done, and we spend our time in preparation for that-trying to execute at a high level on Friday night. There's not a lot different; you're resting on the bus instead of resting in the locker

room. That's kind of how we handle it. We don't talk about it." As of Monday morning, Heaton said the Golden Tigers weren't dealing with any

major injury problems heading into Friday's preseason game. "We have a couple of guys banged up," he said, "but as for right now we should have everyone available and ready to go."

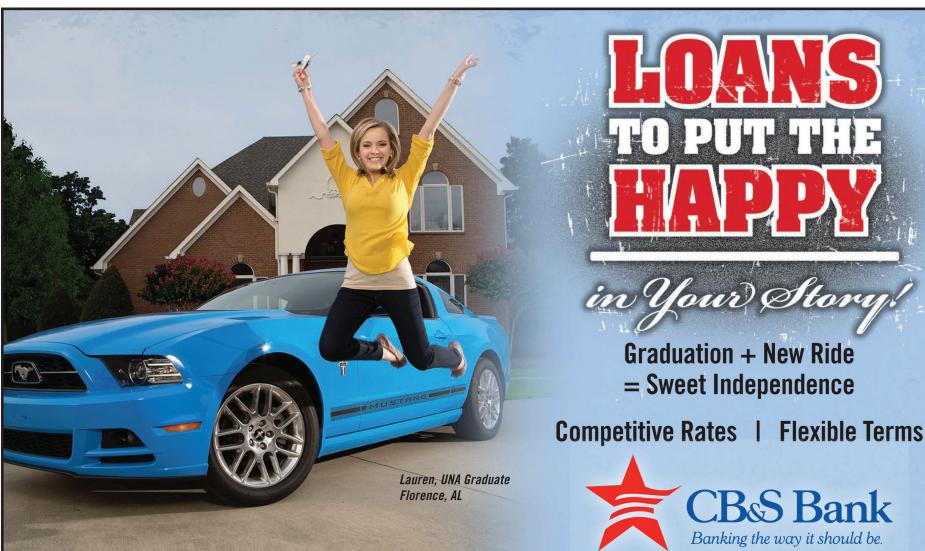


Submit your picks to us each week in one of two ways: Fill out the entry form on this page and mail it to us at 113 Washington Ave. NW, Russellville, AL 35653, or email your picks to us along with your name and phone number at franklinfreepress@yahoo.com. Picks sent in by mail for Week 1 must be postmarked by Friday, September 1, and picks submitted by email for Week 1 must be received by Saturday, September 2 at 10 a.m. Each week, the contestant who correctly picks the most games will win a free T-shirt and the chance to pick in the grand-prize final-week contest. If multiple contestants correctly pick the same number of games in a given week, the tiebreaker score will be used to determine a winner. Contestants are only eligible to win the weekly contest once. No multiple winners allowed. Thanks for playing, and good luck!



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Colbert Heights
Wildcats

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Phil Campbell Bobcats

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Vina Red Devils

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Russellville Golden Tigers

Head Coach: Mark Heaton (fourth season at Russellville)

Record at RHS: 27-9 (19-2 in Region 8 play)

Career record: 71-33 in nine seasons Playoff appearances: Seven (7-7 record)

Previous head coaching stops:

•Haleyville (2012-13)

•Escambia County (2010-11)

•J.U. Blacksher (2008-09)

Assistant Coaches (Offense)

Brett Voss - Coordinator/Quarterbacks

Tony Buckhalter - Running Backs

Michael Phillips - Offensive Line

Wayne Wilkes - Inside Receivers

Corey Flanagan - Outside Receivers

Terry Prince - Quarterbacks

Assistant Coaches (Defense)

Paul Czervionke - Coordinator

Kevin Barnwell - Defensive Line

Mason Willis - Defensive Line

Tim Townley - Inside Linebackers

Trey Stanford - Outside Linebackers

Jermaine Groce - Cornerbacks

Eli Fuller - Safeties

Bryant Bonds - Defensive Assistant

2016 Recap: Heart-stopping, last-second wins over Lee and Jemison paved the way to a 4-0 start, but the Golden Tigers went just 4-4 the rest of the way, giving up an average of 37.5 points in those four defeats. The loss to Brooks in Killen snapped a streak of 14 straight region wins by Russellville and ultimately prevented the Golden Tigers from repeating as Region 8 champs. **2017 Outlook:** Faced with the task of replacing an abundance of veteran talent, Russellville is reloading.

Gone, among others, are quarterback Payton Nichols, a three-year starter who threw for more than 2,000 yards and 20 touchdowns last season; left tackle Austin Stidham, a two-time first-team All-State selection who signed with Troy; all-purpose threat Colin Garrison, an All-State safety in 2016 who also shined as a receiver and a return man; and versatile Marvin Betancourt, an All-State kicker who also started at corner.

Factor in the departure of tailback Zaye Boyd (who transferred to Lawrence County High this summer after rushing for 1,401 yards and scoring 25 touchdowns as a sophomore at RHS last season) and the absence of leading tackler Landon Ezzell (an All-State linebacker who will miss his senior season following elbow surgery), and the Golden Tigers will be relying on a lot of new faces in key places this season as they look to remain contenders in Region 8.

The competition to replace Nichols has been a point of focus throughout the off-season, and Heaton likes both of his options. Dual-threat junior **Devin Buckhalter** (5'11, 170) is dynamic with the ball in his hands and also has a rocket for an arm. Freshman **Luke Barnwell** may look his age in terms of size and stature, but he made tremendous strides this summer and already possesses pocket presence and accuracy beyond his years. At the Northwest Alabama 7-on-7 in July, Barnwell completed 63-of-100 attempts for 15 touchdowns and four interceptions while leading the Golden Tigers to a 6-1 record.

Heaton has suggested that Buckhalter, who served as Nichols' primary backup last year and is now in his third season at the varsity level, will likely take a lot of snaps early in the season while Barnwell continues to get his feet wet. Ultimately, though, Russellville's best offense may feature Barnwell at quarterback and Buckhalter (who led the team with 35 catches for 514 yards in 2016) at outside receiver. Blessed with 4.68 speed in the forty, a 36-inch vertical and strong hands,

Buckhalter has shown the ability to dominate a game on the perimeter. [He had eight catches for 152 yards in the second half alone against Hartselle last year.]

Buckhalter demands double-coverage, which should open up all sorts of opportunities for Russellville's other talented skill players. **Bernard Phinizee** (a 5'8, 180-pound senior who bench-presses 270 pounds and squats 415) has the strength and agility to be a weapon at either fullback or H-back, where he came on strong late last season as a receiver. He'll share backfield duties with senior **Connor Stults**, a 5'9, 197-pound fullback who should provide a physical presence between the tackles.

Senior **Robert Hamilton** (a 5'8, 153-pound burner with 4.5 speed) played almost exclusively on defense last season, but he looked great catching the football and making plays on offense this summer. Hamilton will see a lot of snaps at H-back and can also play in the slot. The Golden Tigers' primary slot weapon will be **Logan Jones**, a 5'9, 170-pound senior who has shown flashes of game-breaking ability. On just 21 offensive touches in 2016, Jones totaled 372 yards and scored four touchdowns. His involvement should increase substantially this season.

Quick junior **Theran Pounders** also plays in the slot, and senior **Kevin Partrich**, junior **Wylie Boyd** and freshmen **Rowe Gallagher** and **Cole Barnett** offer depth at outside receiver.

Following the graduation of Stidham and three other veteran linemen, Russellville will have a new starter at each of the five spots along the offensive front. After excelling at left guard last season, senior **John David Palmer** (5'9, 245) will slide over and take the reins as the starting center. Palmer filled in at center last season when Gabby Pedro-Juan was out with an injury.

Replacing Stidham at left tackle is **Will Rushing**, a 6'0, 220-pound junior who played exclusively on the defensive line last season but has seen plenty of action on the offensive line in years past. Also moving over from the defensive side of the ball is 6'4, 215-pound senior **John David Aycock**, who will take over at right tackle. Heaton believes that Aycock (who runs a 4.75 forty and bench-presses 275 pounds) has the strength and athleticism to make the perimeter run blocks that are so key to Russellville's stretch game.

Junior **Herson Rodriguez** is slated to start at right guard, with freshman **Edgar Amaya** filling Palmer's old spot at left guard.

Heaton has high hopes for a defensive unit that returns no fewer than 10 players with significant game experience. Much of that experience is up front, where senior **Roman Cortez** (5'9, 190) returns after being named the team's Best Defensive Lineman in 2016.

Cortez, who bench-presses 325 pounds and squats 420, had 84 tackles last season, including five for a loss. He'll be joined at defensive end by fellow senior **Jeff Lloyd** (6'2, 205), another strong athlete (305 bench/405 squat) capable of causing problems in the opposing backfield [he had 56 tackles last season, including four for a loss]. Aycock will continue to get reps at end, and Rushing (39 tackles last season) will share nose duties with fellow junior **Andres Tomas**.

The task of replacing inside linebackers Ezzell and Sid Willis, who combined for roughly 250 tackles last year, falls to Stults and junior **Nate Green**. Phinizee (who, according to Heaton, will "probably never come off the field"), starts at one outside linebacker spot, with seniors **Bruce Ambrosio** (71 tackles, two sacks in 2016) and **Calen Bragwell** holding down the other.

Jones and Partrich will start at corner, with Hamilton (47 tackles, seven pass break-ups last season) shifting over to free safety. Buckhalter starts at strong safety and rounds out an athletic, play-making secondary.

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
9/1	at Deshler	13-4 (won 3 straight)
9/8	at Lee*	10-0 (last loss was 1991)
9/15	vs. LCHS*	9-0 (last loss was 1945)
9/22	at Jemison*	1-0
9/29	at Hartselle	9-5 (lost 5 of last 6)
10/6	at SJPII*	3-0 (total points 162-21)
10/13	vs. Brooks*	0-1 (met once since 1985)
10/20	at East Lime*	7-2 (2-2 record in Athens)
10/27	vs. Ardmore*	3-0 (total points 142-30)
11/3	vs. Colbert Co.	4-1 (met once since 2009)
*-Class	s 5A, Region 8 o	pponent

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 1	vs. Deshler	W, 31-15
Week 2	vs. Lee	W, 38-35
Week 3	at LCHS	W, 43-27
Week 4	vs. Jemison	W, 21-20
Week 5	vs. Hartselle	L, 38-45
Week 6	vs. SJPII	W, 54-7
Week 7	at Brooks	L, 21-31
Week 8	vs. East Lime	W, 35-14
Week 9	at Ardmore	W, 40-17
Week 10	at Colbert Co.	L, 21-41
Round 1	vs. Guntersville	W, 35-28
Round 2	at Briarwood	L, 13-33

Record: 8-4 (6-1 in Class 5A, Region 8)

Points per game: 32.3

Points allowed per game: 26.1

Russellville Over the Last 10 Years

Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
2016	8-4	2nd	2nd Round
2015	11-2	1st	Quarterfinals
2014	8-3	2nd	1st Round
2013	4-6	5th	DNQ
2012	9-3	3rd	2nd Round
2011	5-6	3rd	1st Round
2010	11-2	1st	Quarterfinals
2009	12-3	2nd	State Finals
2008	13-2	2nd	State Finals
2007	10-2	2nd	2nd Round

Total Record: 91-33 (15-9 in playoffs) Region Titles: Two (2015, 2010)

Class 5A, Region 8 Standings - 2016

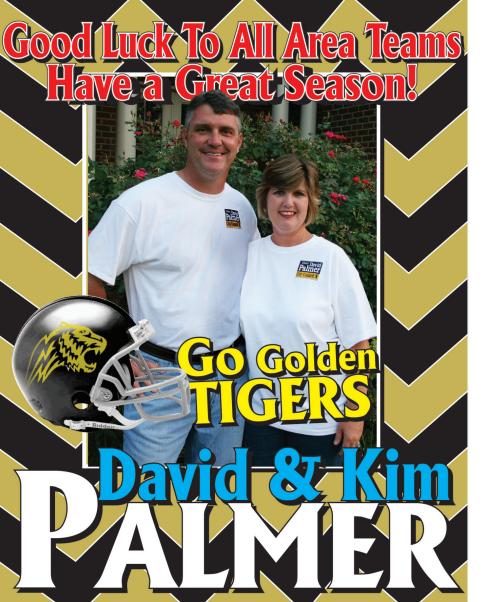
Team	Region	Overall
Brooks*	6-1	9-3
Russellville*	6-1	8-4
Jemison*	5-2	6-5
LCHS*	4-3	5-6
East Lime	3-4	3-7
Lee	3-4	5-5
Ardmore	1-6	2-8
SJPII	0-7	0-10
*-Made playof	ffs	

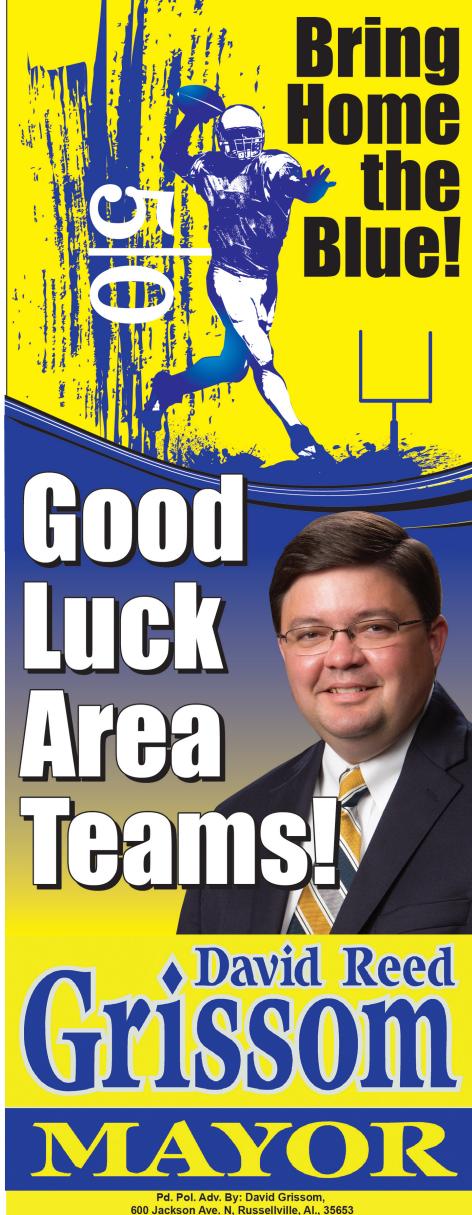
Listen LIVE to the Golden Tigers every Friday night on WGOL-AM 920 and 100.7 FM! Pre-game coverage begins at 5 PM with the *Football Friday Tailgate Show*, followed by the Mark Heaton Coach's Show at 6:30 PM and kickoff at 7 PM!





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....We'll give you a must-see game (involving one of the six teams in the *Free Press* coverage area) for each week of the regular season, plus a bonus game just in case you can't make the headliner.

Are you ready for some football? [That's a rhetorical question.]

Friday, August 25

Must See: Red Bay at Colbert Heights

Last year's game, played on a wet, stormy night at Fred Bostick Memorial Stadium, wasn't decided until the final 30 seconds, when Red Bay quarterback Kolby Bragwell hooked up with tight end Max Bullen on a 38-yard touchdown pass to break a 26-26 tie and give the Tigers their sixth straight win over the Wildcats.

Bragwell and Bullen are both back this season, as is Colbert Heights linebacker Korey Saint, whose terrific all-around effort in last year's game included six tackles, an interception, a fumble return for a score and a 15-yard touchdown toss on a half-back pass—one of six fourth-down conversions between the two teams in a combined six attempts.

This year's meeting at Amos Mitchell Stadium might not deliver as much drama, but there is a little history on the line—Red Bay's Michael Jackson is one win shy of 100 for his career as a high school head coach.

Bonus Game: Phil Campbell at Tharptown

The Wildcats will be seeking their first-ever home win over Phil Campbell this Friday. The Bobcats have won four of five meetings all-time, including last year's weather-shortened 20-0 victory at Parrish Field.

Friday, September 1

Must See: Russellville at Deshler

Mark Heaton will be looking to join Doug Goodwin as the only head coaches in RHS history to win their first four meetings with the rival Tigers. This won't be the official Deshler debut for new head coach Bo Culver [the Tigers open their season a week earlier at Haleyville], but it will be his first taste of one of northwest Alabama's fiercest, oldest rivalries. It will also be his first head-to-head meeting with Heaton, the man he replaced as head coach at Haleyville back in 2014 when Heaton left to take the Russellville job.

The Golden Tigers have won 13 of the last 17 meetings with Deshler, including the last three by a total margin of 70 points. This one could be much more competitive, what with Russellville looking to replace a boatload of veteran talent and Culver and company showing some signs this summer of turning the Tigers around quickly following a 2-8 season in 2016.

Bonus Game: Colbert Heights at Phil Campbell

Last year's meeting on The Mountain produced plenty of offensive fireworks, including nearly 500 rushing yards by Colbert Heights, 225 passing yards and two touchdowns for Phil Campbell quarterback Peyton Thomas, and 73 total points [the Wildcats prevailed, 47-26]. Thomas, now a senior, will try and help the Bobcats snap a six-game losing streak in the series.

Friday, September 8

Must See: Russellville at Lee-Huntsville

There's almost no way this one can match the heart-stopping drama of last year's meeting at Golden Tiger Stadium, which Russellville won 38-35 on a fourth-down touchdown toss from Payton Nichols to Colin Garrison with barely two seconds remaining. Still, it's the all-important region opener for both teams, and every win will be critical in what should be a highly competitive playoff race in Class 5A, Region 8.

Like Russellville, Lee lost its fair share of veteran talent (including dual-threat quarterback Diamonte Douglas and big-play receiver DeShun Grays), but the Generals do return three-star recruit Malik Langham, a 6'5, 255-pound defensive end with a size-17 shoe and the wingspan of a seven-footer. As of late July, Langham, who finished the 2016 season with 70 tackles (including 10 for loss) and eight sacks, had narrowed his college offers down to Tennessee, Washington, Vanderbilt, Penn State, Louisville, Kentucky and Ole Miss.

Bonus Game: Lamar County at Phil Campbell

A late rally by the Bobcats fell just short last September in a 21-19 loss to Lamar

See 'WATCH,' page 35







In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

~ 1 Thessalonians 5:18



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Tharptown Wildcats

Head Coach: Kevin Lacey* (second season at Tharptown)

Record at THS: 2-8 (2-4 in Region 8 play)

Career record: 2-8 in one season

Playoff appearances: None

Previous head coaching stops: None

Assistant Coaches

Jonathan Odom - Defensive Coordinator Marc Tracy - Offensive/Defensive Lines Gary Gunderman - Special Teams

Scott Vance - Running Backs

Joseph Brown - Receivers/Defensive Backs

*-Lacey serves as Offensive Coordinator and QB coach

2016 Recap: After surrendering a total of 150 points during an 0-4 start, the Wildcats picked up a pair of wins in Region 8 play after their bye week and finished just one spot out of a playoff berth.

2017 Outlook: Lacey was pleased with the growth his young team showed in the areas of toughness and competitiveness last season; he's hopeful that a year of experience will help the 'Cats close out games in stronger fashion this season.

Tharptown's strength in 2017 should be a collection of capable play-makers at the skill positions. Junior **Carson Petree** has a season under his belt now as the starting quarterback, and he impressed Lacey last year with his command of the Wildcats' flex-bone offense.

"He ran the offense really well," Lacey said of Petree, who helped the Wildcats top the 20-point mark three times in their last five games of 2016. "We moved the football last year. We just struggled stopping some people from moving it. But I was happy with how Carson ran the offense. He's good at making the right read and

getting the ball where it needs to go, and he adds the running element. He struggled throwing the ball, but I do think he's grown some and his arm's gotten stronger.

"I'm excited to see where he'll be this year as far as that goes."

Petree has been competing this off-season with fellow junior **K.J. Hamilton**, a Russellville transfer whom Lacey described as "super-athletic." If Hamilton (right) wins the quarterback job, Petree can put his own speed and athleticism to use as a receiver; if Petree sticks at quarterback, then Hamilton could give the Wildcats another weapon at running back along with senior **Payton Price**. Senior back/receiver **Trent Risley** also returns, as does junior receiver **Luis Macias**.

"We're excited about our skill guys," Lacey said this summer. "They were all young last year, but they all did well last year. Now, with them being juniors and seniors, we're excited to see what they can do."

Whether or not the Wildcats can take a step forward and truly contend for a playoff spot depends a lot on how well they play up front. Sophomores **Ruben Alfaro** (center) and **Gunner Lane** (guard) are returning starters on the offensive line, as are junior guard **Evan Franks** and senior tackle **Frank Miguel**. Senior **Skyler Fields** will also start at tackle.

Fields anchors the defense as a returning starter at inside linebacker, where he'll be joined by Hamilton. Price and Risley are back on the outside, giving the Wildcats an experienced and athletic linebacker corps.

Franks and **Alex Flores** will start at defensive tackle, with Alfaro and **Dakota Palmer** lining up at defensive end in Tharptown's 4-4 front. Petree roams the middle of the field at safety, with Macias and **Chase O'Conner** holding down the corner spots.

ARPHONE WILDCATS

Class 1A, Region 8 Standings - 2016

Team	Region	Overall
Hackleburg*	6-0	9-3
Cherokee*	5-1	5-6
Phillips*	3-3	3-8
S. Christian*	3-3	3-8
Tharptown	2-4	2-8
Waterloo	2-4	4-6
Vina	0-6	2-8
*-Made playof	fs	

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
8/25	vs. PCHS	1-4 (lost 3 straight)
9/1	vs. Red Bay	0-3 (out-scored 180-14)
9/8	at S. Christian*	0-8

9/15 vs. Hackleburg* 0-7 (avg. score, 40-15)

9/22 **OPEN** 9/29 **vs. Lynn**

vs. Lynn 0-1

10/6 at Waterloo* 5-5 (won 5 of last 6)

10/13 vs. Phillips* 2-8 (lost 3 straight) 10/20 at Cherokee* 1-4 (won 9-3 in 2014)

10/27 vs. Vina* 3-7 (won 3 straight) 11/3 at DHCA 0-5

*-Class 1A, Region 8 opponent

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 0	at PCHS	L, 0-20
Week 1	at Red Bay	L, 7-59
Week 2	vs. S. Christian	L, 13-41
Week 3	at Hackleburg	L, 14-30
Week 4	OPEN	
Week 5	at Lynn	L, 14-24
Week 6	vs. Waterloo	W, 29-21
Week 7	at Phillips	L, 21-44
Week 8	vs. Cherokee	L, 3-27
Week 9	at Vina	W, 27-26
Week 10	vs. DHCA	L, 7-41
Record: 2-8 (2-	4 in Class 1A, R	egion 8)

Points per game: 13.5

Points allowed per game: 33.3

Tharptown Over the Last 10 Years

Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
Year 2016	2-8	5th	DNQ
2015	0-10	Last	DNQ
2014	2-8	5th	DNQ
2013	5-5	6th	DNQ
2012	3-7	6th	DNQ
2011	0-10	Last	DNQ
2010	2-8	6th	DNQ
2009	2-8	5th	DNQ
2008 2007	1-9	8th	DNQ
2007	7-3	N/A	DNO

Total Record: 24-76 Region Titles: None

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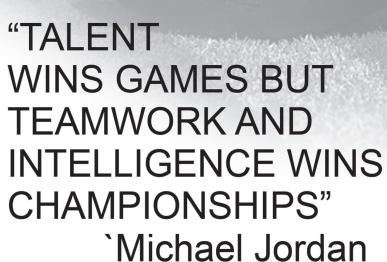
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Senator Larry Stutts

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Head Coach: Michael Jackson* (fourth season at Red Bay)

Record at Red Bay: 28-6 (16-2 in Region 8 play)

Career record: 99-68 in 15 seasons

Playoff appearances: Nine (8-9 record)

Previous head coaching stops:

•Russellville (2011-13)

•Buckhorn (2002-10)

Assistant Coaches

Jamie Purser - Defensive Coordinator and LBs Richard Maggerise - Secondary and Offensive Skill Jason Vinson - JV and Offensive Skill Anthony Pounds - JV and Offensive Line Kelby Hallmark - Offensive Skill Adam Hester - JV and Stats *-Jackson serves as Offensive Coordinator and coaches both the offensive and defensive lines

2016 Recap: The Tigers had won 23 straight games in the regular season and 20 straight games in region play before a botched extra-point attempt in the fourth quarter cost them in the Week 6 loss to Lamar County. Red Bay played without a handful of injured starters in the shutout loss to Sheffield before righting the ship with three straight wins to close out the regular season. The Tigers made the playoffs for the 18th consecutive season but lost to Cleveland in the first round.

2017 Outlook: Head coach Michael Jackson (above, right) has been careful not to hype this year's freshman class too much, but it's fair to say that he's excited about the potential of a group that goes 18 deep and features a quartet of immediate-impact players in Alex Kennedy, Cam McKinney, Logan Scott and Jalen Vinson. Factor in sophomores like Caleb Seeley and Dylan Hester on the offensive line, Ethan Meier at defensive end and Levi Raper at linebacker, and this will easily be Jackson's youngest team at Red Bay.

The future is bright, but that doesn't mean the Tigers won't be good in the present. A solid cast of returning veterans is led by 6'2, 195-pound junior quarterback **Kolby Bragwell** (below), who enters his second season as the starter. Receivers Jesus Kelly and Kaleb Burroughs are gone, but athletic senior **Max Bullen** is primed for a larger role in 2017. Bullen has the size





(6'2, 188), speed (4.6 forty) and strength (255 bench/400 squat) to play at the next level; he should be Bragwell's favorite target in the passing game while also serving as a big-play weapon on jet sweeps in the ground game. In the spring game against Tishomingo (MS) County in May, Bullen had rushes of 40 and 25 yards and also caught a long touchdown pass from Bragwell in the Tigers' 21-7 win.

Seniors **Luke Rooker** and **Hayden Murray** will line up at outside receiver, and fellow senior **Skylar Brazil** plays in the slot. As is always the case with Jackson's teams, though, Red Bay's offense will be built around the power run game. This year's featured runner will be senior tailback **Aaron Lewey**, who saw plenty of action last season when starter Tate Ozbirn was injured.

Lewey already has four 100-yard rushing efforts to his credit, including 142 yards on 33 carries against Sheffield last season and 109 yards and two touchdowns in the rout of Cherokee. Lewey looked the part of a bellcow runner in the spring game, rushing for 150 yards against Tish County.

Sophomore **Colbie King** will spell Lewey at tailback, and freshmen Kennedy and Scott will split reps at H-back. Vinson, a dynamic athlete in the making, will back up Bragwell at quarterback and could also make an impact at the other skill spots in certain situations.

Three veterans must be replaced up front, but senior right tackle **Hunter Tyler** brings size (6'3, 320) and experience (he's entering his fourth season as a starter) to the offensive line. McKinney (6'2, 235) will man the left tackle spot as a freshman, with Meier providing depth. **Elijah Ingle**, a 240-pound junior, returns at left guard, with the 240-pound Seeley taking over at right guard and the 230-pound Hester sliding in at center.

Red Bay must replace seven starters on defense, including long-time leading tacklers Andrew Ray and Andrew Richardson. Taking over for those two veteran stalwarts at inside linebacker will be a pair of freshmen, McKinney and Kennedy, with Raper providing depth.

All of the varsity experience at the linebacker spot is on the outside, where Bragwell, Bullen and Brazil form a play-making trio at the rover position. Bragwell was everywhere in the spring game, picking off a pass and recovering a pair of fumbles against Tish County.

Murray and Rooker are projected to start at corner, with Vinson also expected to get reps in the secondary.

Up front, Ingle is moving from defensive end to tackle, where he'll join senior **Joseph Newell** (5'10, 240) on the interior of a reshuffled D-line. Big junior **Devin Nichols** (6'3, 315) provides depth at tackle, and Meier and Scott will line up at defensive end.

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
8/25	at C. Heights	10-3 (won 6 straight)
9/1	at Tharptown	3-0 (total points 180-14)
9/8	at Mars Hill*	3-0 (total points 136-8)
9/15	vs. Hatton*	17-0 (last loss was 1987)
9/22	vs. Belmont	8-3 (won 5 straight)
9/29	OPEN	, ,
10/6	at Lamar Co.*	2-2
10/13	vs. Sheffield*	4-1
10/20	at Sulligent*	4-2 (won 4 straight)
10/27	vs. PCHS*	14-3 (won 11 straight)
11/2	vs. Cherokee	16-1 (won 11 straight)
*-Class	2A, Region 8 of	pponent

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 0	vs. C. Heights	W, 33-26
Week 1	vs. Tharptown	W, 59-7
Week 2	vs. Mars Hill	W, 30-8
Week 3	at Hatton	W, 30-7
Week 4	OPEN	
Week 5	at Belmont	W, 21-13
Week 6	vs. Lamar Co.	L, 20-21
Week 7	at Sheffield	L, 0-20
Week 8	vs. Sulligent	W, 30-29 (2 OT)
Week 9	at PCHS	W, 30-13
Week 10	at Cherokee	W, 40-14
Round 1	at Cleveland	L, 14-41
l		

Record: 8-3 (4-2 in Class 2A, Region 8)

Points per game: 27.9

Points allowed per game: 18.1

Red Bay Over the Last 10 Years

Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
2016	8-3	3rd	1st Round
2015	11-1	1st	2nd Round
2014	9-2	1st	1st Round
2013	8-3	2nd	1st Round
2012	8-4	2nd	2nd Round
2011	10-2	1st	2nd Round
2010	5-6	4th	1st Round
2009	5-6	4th	1st Round
2008	4-7	4th	1st Round
2007	13-1	1st	Semifinals

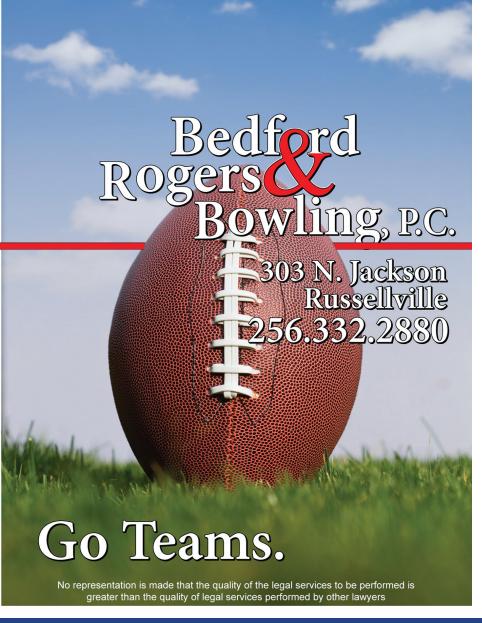
Total Record: 81-35 (6-10 in playoffs) Region Titles: Four (2015, 2014, 2011, 2007)

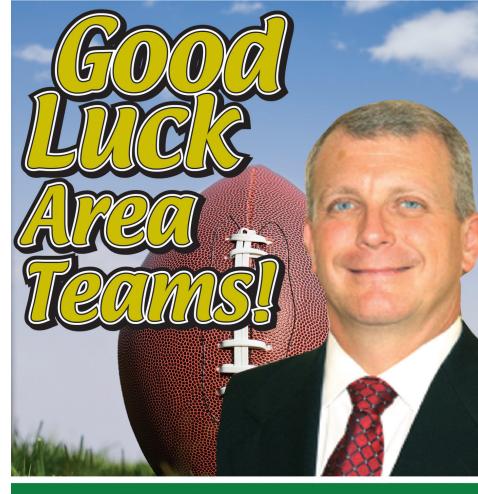
Class 2A, Region 8 Standings - 2016

Team	Region	Overall
Lamar Co.*	5-1	6-5
Sheffield*	5-1	9-3
Red Bay*	4-2	8-3
Sulligent*	4-2	6-5
Mars Hill	2-4	6-4
Hatton	1-5	3-7
PCHS	0-6	2-8
*-Made playo	ffs	

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Colbert Heights Wildcats

Head Coach: Taylor Leathers* (second season at Colbert Heights)

Record at CHHS: 4-6 (3-4 in Region 8 play)

Career record: 4-6 in one season Playoff appearances: None

rayon appearances. None

Previous head coaching stops: None

Assistant Coaches

Lonnie Robinson - Defensive Coordinator, LBs
Justin Helms - Offensive/Defensive Lines
Scott Hunter - Receivers/Safeties, Kicking Game
Isaac Fuller - Running Backs/Corners, Special Teams
Clint Nunley - Head Junior High, Varsity Def. Asst.
Phillip Willingham - Asst. Junior High, Varsity Offense
Cody Counce - Volunteer Assistant

Brent Oliver - Athletic Trainer

Tommy Johnson - Head Athletic Manager

*-Leathers serves as Offensive Coordinator and QBs

2016 Recap: Colbert Heights started 3-1 but then lost five of its last six to finish with a 4-6 record for the fourth consecutive season. The Wildcats were poised to end their playoff drought heading into the season finale, but the gut-wrenching loss at East Lawrence (coupled with West Morgan's 17-7 upset of Lexington on the same night) kept them out for the fifth straight year.

2017 Outlook: The Wildcats have more seniors on the roster this year (18) than last year (13), but they won't be quite as seasoned in terms of actual game experience. Replacing the likes of defensive linemen Carson Peoples and Justin Roberts, receivers Ricky Thomas and Austin Davis, and linebacker/fullback J.J. Alexander will be a challenge.

Head coach Taylor Leathers does have the luxury of bringing back last year's Offensive MVP in senior quarterback **Kevin Shaw**. Fast and elusive, Shaw (above, 5) led Colbert Heights in rushing as a junior with more than 700 yards and 12 touchdowns. He also threw for more than 700 yards, but he'll have to find a new favorite target this season following the graduation of Thomas and Davis, the team's two leading receivers a year ago. The Wildcats are counting on senior **Devin Holt** to help fill the void at receiver this season.

Senior fullback **Dylan Chandler** (6'2, 180) is set to replace Alexander as the featured runner (along with Shaw) in Leathers' ground-heavy offensive attack. Speedy senior **Chandler Willis** (6'1, 160) is another weapon in the backfield, and Leathers expects hardworking senior **Bevin Foust** (5'9, 185) to play more of a traditional tight end role this season after playing H-back in 2016.

The Wildcats do return quite a bit of experience up



front, where four key members of the offensive line are back. Senior tackle **Cain Phifer**, senior guards **Chason Scott** and **Brannon Bradford**, and junior tackle **Tyler Tubbs** will be joined in the trenches this season by sophomore center **Logan Simpson**.

The 6'1, 215-pound Tubbs will also start on defense, where he'll line up opposite senior **Bud Pratt** at end. Phifer, another two-way man, and fellow tackle **Dalton Davis** will anchor the interior of the D-line. Finding a way to hold their own at the point of attack with former stalwarts Peoples and Roberts no longer around will be key for the Wildcats in 2017.

There are far fewer concerns at linebacker, where returning starters **Korey Saint** and **Brendan Borden** are joined by fellow seniors Foust and Chandler in a solid, experienced group. The 6'2, 200-pound Saint had a monster game last season in the opener at Red Bay, making six tackles, picking off a pass and returning a fumble for a touchdown.

After some struggles on the back end last year, Leathers said that improved play in the secondary was a focus during the off-season. The super-athletic Shaw will see meaningful snaps at safety, along with junior **J.J. Michael**. Senior **Tanner Rikard** and freshman **Carson Shaw** will start at corner.

Team	Region	Overall
Lauderdale Co.*	6-1	7-5
Colbert Co.*	6-1	9-3
Lexington*	5-2	8-4
West Morgan*	4-3	7-4
Colbert Heights	3-4	4-6
Clements	2-5	4-6
East Lawrence	2-5	2-8
Elkmont	0-7	0-10
*-Made playoffs		

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
8/25	vs. Red Bay	3-10 (lost 6 straight)
9/1	at PCHS	6-1 (won 6 straight)
9/8	at Clements*	7-2 (won 4 straight)
9/15	at West Morgan*	4-1 (won 4 straight)
9/22	vs. Lexington*	5-10 (lost 5 straight)
9/29	at Sheffield	5-8 (lost 6 straight)
10/6	vs. Elkmont*	7-2
10/13	vs. Colbert Co.*	1-12 (lost 5 straight)
10/20	at Lauderdale Co.*	3-8 (lost 3 straight)
10/27	vs. East Lawrence*	0-1
*-Class	3A, Region 8 oppon	ent

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 0	at Red Bay	L, 26-33
Week 1	vs. PCHS	W, 47-26
Week 2	vs. Clements	W, 22-9
Week 3	vs. W. Morgan	W, 42-27
Week 4	at Lexington	L, 14-35
Week 5	vs. Sheffield	L, 14-42
Week 6	at Elkmont	W, 32-15
Week 7	at Colbert Co.	L, 0-41
Week 8	vs. LCHS	L, 14-37
Week 9	at E. Lawrence	L, 24-30

Record: 4-6 (3-4 in Class 3A, Region 8)

Points per game: 23.5

Points allowed per game: 29.5

Colbert Heights Over the Last 10 Years

Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
2016	4-6	5th	DNQ
2015	4-6	6th	DNQ
2014	4-6	6th	DNQ
2013	4-6	5th	DNQ
2012	2-8	6th	DNQ
2011	8-3	2nd	1st Round
2010	8-3	2nd	1st Round
2009	7-4	4th	1st Round
2008	5-5	6th	DNQ
2007	10-2	2nd	2nd Round

Total Record: 56-49 (1-4 in playoffs)

Region Titles: None

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Phil Campbell Bobcats

Head Coach: Ryan Swinney* (fifth season at Phil Campbell)

Record at PCHS: 10-32 (6-19 in Region 8 play)

Career record: 10-32 in four seasons Playoff appearances: Two (0-2 record) Previous head coaching stops: None

Assistant Coaches

Jonathan Raper - Defensive Coordinator, coaches LBs, OBs and RBs

Lucas Gilbert - Receivers/Defensive Backs

Darby Allison - Offensive/Defensive Line Jordan Benford - Junior Varsity

*-Swinney serves as Offensive Coordinator

2016 Recap: Despite failing to win a region game, Phil Campbell wasn't that far from being a playoff team. The Bobcats opened Region 8 play with close losses to Lamar County and Sheffield, who would go on to finish as the top two teams in the region. Narrow defeats remained a theme throughout the rest of 2016 for the 'Cats, who let a fourth-quarter lead slip away against Mars Hill and then fell by a touchdown at Hatton. Phil Campbell was a handful of plays away from making the postseason for a third straight year.

2017 Outlook: The bottom of Region 8 is getting stronger, so the Bobcats will have to be better if they hope to become a playoff team again. Twelve seniors (at least half of whom were major contributors) moved on in May, so head coach Ryan Swinney (above, in huddle) and his staff will be relying on several new faces to fill key roles in 2017.

Few teams, however, have a quarterback as battletested or accomplished as senior **Peyton Thomas**, who has thrown a total of 30 touchdown passes over the past two seasons. Last year, Thomas (6'0, 185) carried the Phil Campbell offense, throwing for 1,400 yards and 16 scores while also rushing for more than 400 yards and seven touchdowns. Waiting in the wings behind Thomas is freshman **Ridge Raper**.

Thomas is as experienced as they come, but the cast of skill players around him is almost entirely new. Senior **Joe Hardy**, who thrived last season as an H-back and slot receiver, would undoubtedly have been the Bobcats' primary offensive weapon this season, but injuries have forced him to end his career prematurely.

Hardy missed virtually all of his sophomore season in 2015 after suffering a broken leg in Week 1 against Falkville. He recovered from that setback and had scored a team-best eight combined touchdowns rushing and receiving through five games last season before sustaining a broken ankle against Phillips in Week 6.

Hardy, a multi-sport athlete who also plays basketball and baseball at Phil Campbell, made the difficult choice this summer not to return to the football field. The Bobcats will have to press on without one of their most productive players and best locker room leaders.

"That hurts," said Swinney, a staunch admirer of Hardy's determination and passion for the game of football. "It's understandable, though. To go through what he went through, nobody should have to go through that--especially a kid who loves the game like he does. It was a decision he made with his family and the doctors, and I'll honor it a hundred percent.

"As a parent, I understand it. As a coach, I hate it, because I'd love to have him out there. But as a parent, I'm almost glad he's not, not after what he had to go through the last two years."

Swinney hopes to see Hardy exert whatever positive influence he can on the Bobcats this season.

"He's still gonna be a part of our team," Swinney said. "We want him to be down there on Friday nights and at practices whenever he can, because all of our guys respect him so much. He's still a Bobcat football



player. It's just not the role he wanted to be in. But it's a decision that had to be made, and it's the right one."

Replacing Hardy in the slot will be a challenge, but sophomore **Brandon Baker** showed promise in the spring game against Winston County in May, hauling in a 31-yard touchdown toss from Thomas. Senior **Hunter Hutcheson**, just recently cleared to return to action after sustaining a knee injury in last year's season finale at Hackleburg, also plays in the slot, as do senior **Sam Pierce** and freshman **Austen Baker**.

The Bobcats will have to find someone to stretch the field vertically now that big-play receiver Austin Riner has graduated. Senior **Daniel Smith** and sophomore **Ben Williams** (who sat out the spring while recovering from a knee injury sustained during basketball season) will lead the way at outside receiver, with **Hunter Saint** and senior **Austin Berry** also in the mix.

When in doubt, Thomas can always look for senior tight end **Brody Nix** (6'2, 205), who provides a big, physical, athletic target in the middle of the field. **Ty Leindecker**, a freshman, will back up Nix.

Taking over as the featured ball-carrier is senior tailback **Seth Brindley** (6'0, 175), who saw significant reps last year playing behind then-starter Colby Baker. Senior **Brandon Thomas** will back up Brindley, and Swinney believes that senior fullback **Jason Mansell** (who did not play in 2016) can help provide a physical presence between the tackles now that 230-pound Trey Nalls has graduated. Sophomore **Imer Ordonez** will also see time at fullback.

Phil Campbell has quite a bit of experience along the offensive line, where seniors Caleb Hagood (left tackle), Dustin Hamby (center) and Chase Hutchens (right tackle) are all returning starters. Joining the 5'11, 235-pound Hagood on the left side is junior guard Dakota Mansell (6'0, 185). Sophomore Kaleb Solis is set to take over as the starting right guard. Providing depth up front will be left tackle Joseph Reynolds, senior left guard Joseph Hall (6'2, 226) and senior right tackle Jacob Demastus (6'0, 250).

Defensively, Swinney has talked often about the need for Phil Campbell to improve at stopping the run. The Bobcats have no shortage of bodies up front, where Solis and Hagood lead a defensive tackle rotation that also includes Reynolds, Demastus, Hamby and Hall. Jason Mansell, Hutchens and Ordonez form a solid group at defensive end, along with Hunter Hutcheson.

Nix, one of the Bobcats' more experienced defenders, will be joined at outside linebacker by Brandon Thomas, with Raper and Austen Baker providing depth. Dakota Mansell and Leindecker will handle the inside linebacker spots.

The veteran presence and play-making ability of Riner and Hardy will have to be replaced on the back end. Sam Pierce and Ben Williams will man the safety spots, with Hunter Saint also in the mix. The versatile Brindley moves to corner, where he'll play opposite Brandon Baker. Daniel Smith and Austen Berry round out the defensive backfield.

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
8/25	at Tharptown	4-1 (won 3 straight)
9/1	vs. C. Heights	1-6 (lost 6 straight)
9/8	vs. Lamar Co.*	0-6 (last win was 1999)
9/15	at Sheffield*	0-3
9/22	vs. Sulligent*	0-7 (last win was 1999)
9/29	at Phillips	2-7
10/6	OPEN	
10/13	at Mars Hill*	2-1
10/20	vs. Hatton*	2-11 (lost 6 straight)
10/27	at Red Bay*	3-14 (lost 11 straight)
11/2	vs. Hackleburg	3-14 (lost 14 straight)
*-Class	2A. Region 8 or	` ' '

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 0	vs. Tharptown	W, 20-0
Week 1	at C. Heights	L, 26-47
Week 2	at Lamar Co.	L, 19-21
Week 3	vs. Sheffield	L, 27-35
Week 4	at Sulligent	L, 7-42
Week 5	vs. Phillips	W, 35-20
Week 6	OPEN	
Week 7	vs. Mars Hill	L, 13-24
Week 8	at Hatton	L, 20-26
Week 9	vs. Red Bay	L, 13-30
Week 10	at Hackleburg	L, 19-35

Record: 2-8 (0-6 in Class 2A, Region 8)

Points per game: 19.9

Points allowed per game: 28.0

Phil Campbell Over the Last 10 Years

Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
2016	2-8	Last	DNQ
2015	4-7	4th	1st Round
2014	4-7	4th	1st Round
2013	0-10	Last	DNQ
2012	2-8	7th	DNQ
2011	2-8	7th	DNQ
2010	4-6	6th	DNQ
2009	3-7	7th	DNQ
2008	1-9	8th	DNQ
2007	0-10	8th	DNQ

Total Record: 22-80 (0-2 in playoffs)

Region Titles: None

Class 2A, Region 8 Standings - 2016

Team	Region	Overall
Lamar Co.*	5-1	6-5
Sheffield*	5-1	9-3
Red Bay*	4-2	8-3
Sulligent*	4-2	6-5
Mars Hill	2-4	6-4
Hatton	1-5	3-7
PCHS	0-6	2-8
*-Made playo	ffs	

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Vina Red Devils

Head Coach: Jason Harris* (first season as head coach at Vina)

Previous head coaching stops: None

Assistant Coaches

David Ward - Offensive Coordinator

Jake Ward - Offense

Jonathan Jones - Special Teams/Offense/Defense

Talon Thomas - Special Teams

Terry Swinney - Defense

*-Harris serves as Defensive Coordinator

2016 Recap: Both of Vina's wins came against nonregion opponents, but the Red Devils might not be that far from reaching first-year head coach Jason Harris's stated goal of being a playoff team in 2017. They lost region games to Waterloo, Cherokee and Tharptown by a total of just 11 points.

2017 Outlook: Harris takes over as the head coach after spending the previous five seasons as Vina's defensive coordinator. The Red Devils have some experience at quarterback, where senior Blake Hardin returns after splitting time with the now-departed Tyler Renfrow in 2016. In his first season as the full-time starter, Hardin is learning the ins and outs of the new offensive system installed by first-year coordinator David Ward. Harris has been pleased with Hardin's progress in picking up the new terminology and getting a handle on the system, which Harris said will ideally feature a 70-30 split in favor of the run.

That should mean plenty of carries to divide among the backfield trio of junior Jacob Lewis, senior Austin Harper and sophomore Jackson Landers, all of whom have experience toting the rock. When Hardin does put the ball in the air, junior Chance Kennedy and senior Tanner McAlister will be his top targets.

Vina is young up front, with guard Zach Davidson and tackles Dawson Miller and Joseph Dawson all in line to start as freshmen. Senior center Austin Childers, a returning starter, anchors the O-line. Junior Issac Harper starts at guard, and senior Justin Blackburn provides depth at tackle. Junior tight end **Timmy Sexton** primarily serves as a sixth blocker.

Harris said the strength of Vina's 4-3 base defense will be a big and physical line, with Issac Harper and junior Tyler Blackburn holding down the tackle spots and Sexton, Davidson and Miller rotating at end. Austin Childers, Austin Harper and Lewis are the linebackers.

McAlister and Landers are the starting corners, with Kennedy and **Braden Moomaw** lining up at safety.

Vina Over the Last 10 Years			
Year	Record	Region Finish	Playoffs
2016	2-8	Last	DNQ
2015	5-6	4th	1st Round
2014	2-8	6th	DNQ
2013	0-10	Last	DNQ
2012	0-10	Last	DNQ
2011	2-8	6th	DNQ
2010	2-8	7th	DNQ
2009	4-7	4th	1st Round
2008	2-8	6th	DNQ
2007	2-8	Last	DNQ
Total Record: 21-81 (0-2 in playoffs)			

2017 Schedule (with record vs. opponent since 2000)

Date	Opponent	Record since 2000
8/25	at Mars Hill	0-1
9/1	vs. Brilliant	1-6
9/8	vs. Waterloo*	6-4 (3-0 at home)
9/15	at Phillips*	2-14 (lost 12 straight)
9/22	vs. Cherokee*	0-5 (last win was 1950)
9/29	vs. Meek	0-5 (last win was 1985)
10/6	at ASD	1-1 (last win was 2000)
10/13	at S. Christian*	2-12 (won in 2008, 2015)
10/20	vs. Hackleburg*	1-14 (lost 13 straight)
10/27	at Tharptown*	7-3 (lost 3 straight)
*-Clas	s 1A, Region 8 op	ponent

2016 Schedule and Results

Week 0	vs. Mars Hill	L, 6-22
Week 1	at Brilliant	W, 52-16
Week 2	at Waterloo	L, 30-33
Week 3	vs. Phillips	L, 8-24
Week 4	at Cherokee	L, 20-27
Week 5	at Meek	L, 12-46
Week 6	vs. ASD	W, 42-6
Week 7	vs. S. Christian	L, 14-42
Week 8	at Hackleburg	L, 12-34
Week 9	vs. Tharptown	L, 26-27
Record: 2-	8 (0-6 in Class 1A, R	Region 8)

Points per game: 22.2

Points allowed per game: 27.7

For updates on Vina football all season, go online to www.franklinfreepress.net!

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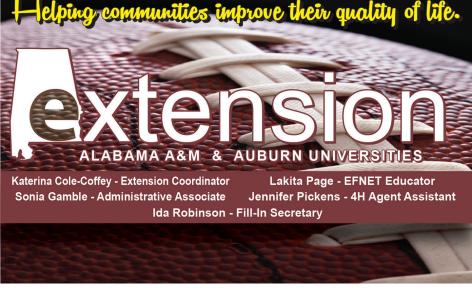
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County, which went on to win the Class 2A, Region 8 title. Phil Campbell hasn't beaten the Bulldogs since a 21-17 win in 1999, losing all six meetings since.

Friday, September 15

Must See: Lawrence County at Russellville

The Golden Tigers haven't lost to Lawrence County since World War II, but each of the last three meetings has been highly competitive—not to mention downright nasty. There's no love lost between these two programs, and the feisty Red Devils would like nothing more than to spoil Russellville's only home game in the season's first six weeks.

The transfer of stud tailback Zaye Boyd (whose 165 rushing yards and three touchdowns carried the Golden Tigers to a 43-27 win in Moulton last September) from Russellville to Lawrence County this summer only serves to thicken the plot.

Bonus Game: Hackleburg at Tharptown

The Wildcats, who have a talented collection of skill players led by Russellville transfer K.J. Hamilton at their disposal, will be better in year number two under head coach Kevin Lacey. An early visit from Hackleburg—a team Tharptown has never beaten and rarely challenged in seven all-time meetings—should provide an indication of just *how much* better.

Friday, September 22

Must See: Lexington at Colbert Heights

Colbert Heights head coach Taylor Leathers served as Lexington's offensive coordinator for four years prior to taking over the Wildcat program in 2016. His old pals didn't do him any favors last year, though—the Golden Bears fumbled five times in a stunning 17-7 loss to West Morgan in the season's final week, a result that kept Colbert Heights (which failed to handle its own business in the season finale, losing 30-24 at East Lawrence) out of the playoffs for the fifth straight season.

If senior quarterback Kevin Shaw and the Wildcats are to succeed in ending that postseason drought this year, a win at home over Lexington would go a long way.

Bonus Game: Russellville at Mae Jemison

J.O. Johnson, Mae Jemison...call it what you want, but these two programs have a track record of producing classic finishes when they get together. Last year, the Golden Tigers overcame a fast start by Jemison to prevail 21-20 on a last-minute touchdown. The last three meetings—all Russellville wins—have been decided by a total of just five points.

Friday, September 29

Must See: Russellville at Hartselle

Think Hartselle will remember Devin Buckhalter? In last year's game at Golden Tiger Stadium, the dynamic receiver spearheaded a rousing second-half comeback, catching eight passes for 152 yards and a score as Russellville rallied from a three-touchdown deficit to pull even at 38-all in the final minutes. Hartselle scored late and held on for a 45-38 win, its fifth in the last six meetings between these two rivals, but Buckhalter certainly left his mark.

Perhaps the biggest question heading into this year's meeting at J.P. Cain Stadium (where the Golden Tigers haven't won since a quarterfinal playoff game in 2008) will be whether the 5'11, 170-pound junior lines up at quarterback [he spent the summer splitting reps with freshman Luke Barnwell] or receiver. Most likely, the answer will be both.

Just not on the same play. Not even Buckhalter is that good.

Bonus Game: Phil Campbell at Phillips

The Bobcats beat the Bears 35-20 last year to snap a five-game skid in the series, but they haven't won in Bear Creek since 1983.

Friday, October 6

Must See: Red Bay at Lamar County

Last season, Lamar County held off a Red Bay rally (due in part to a botched extrapoint attempt midway through the fourth quarter) to prevail 21-20, ending the Tigers' streak of 23 consecutive wins in regular-season play and 20 straight wins in Class 2A, Region 8 play. This season, junior quarterback Kolby Bragwell (who rushed for 85 yards and a touchdown and also threw an 81-yard scoring strike to then-senior Kaleb Burroughs in last year's meeting) will try and help Red Bay exact its revenge in Vernon.

Bonus Game: Tharptown at Waterloo

The Wildcats beat the Cougars 29-21 at home last season, giving Kevin Lacey his first win as a high school head coach. This year, Tharptown will make the long trek to Waterloo in search of its sixth win in the last seven meetings.

Friday, October 13

Must See: Brooks at Russellville

Last year's meeting in Killen (won by Brooks, 31-21) ultimately decided the Class 5A, Region 8 championship. This season the Lions will travel to Russellville and play at Golden Tiger Stadium—in front of what promises to be a hostile home crowd—for the first time since 1985.

Big tailback Deondre Hampton, who gashed the Golden Tigers for 274 yards on 37 carries in last year's win, is no longer around, but Brooks might be the favorite to win the region again anyway. Quarterback Lake Spurgeon and receiver Lazarius Decatur (who hooked up for a pair of touchdowns against Russellville last season) are both back, and 6'4, 330-pound tackle Kam Stutts (an Auburn commit) leads what should be a very good offensive line.

If they survive that mid-September visit from Lawrence County, the Golden Tigers will still be unbeaten at home in region play under Heaton when the Lions come calling.

Bonus Game: Phil Campbell at Mars Hill

The Bobcats won the first two meetings in 2014 and 2015, but Mars Hill got on the board with a 24-13 victory last year. Neither of these teams made the playoffs last season. Both would like to this season. Conventional wisdom says that only one—at most—will get in, which makes this one a must-win affair.

Friday, October 20

Must See: Red Bay at Sulligent

Red Bay's Michael Jackson, who has logged 15 years on the sideline as a high school head coach, called last year's meeting with the Blue Devils "probably the most exciting game I've ever been involved with as a coach." He'll get no argument from us. Trailing 14-6 with five minutes left in the game, the Tigers got an 80-yard kickoff return for a touchdown from then-senior Jesus Kelly and wound up winning 30-29 in double-overtime when Kelly scored the clinching two-point conversion on a quarterback sweep out of the Wildcat formation.

It's doubtful that this year's meeting can match that instant classic in terms of pure drama, but it could be just as important in the Class 2A, Region 8 race.

Bonus Game: Russellville at East Limestone

In three seasons under Mark Heaton, the Golden Tigers have played 21 region games. They've lost only two—at Brooks last year, and at East Limestone in early October of 2014. Russellville cruised to a 35-14 win at home last year, but the Indians are 2-2 versus the Golden Tigers all-time in Athens.

Friday, October 27

Must See: Phil Campbell at Red Bay

Much like the Alabama/Tennessee rivalry at the college level, it's been one-sided of late, but you still want to watch. Phil Campbell took a step in the right direction last season, competing with the Tigers for four quarters in a 30-13 loss at Parrish Field. Red Bay had won the previous three meetings by exactly 56 points apiece and has now beaten the Bobcats 11 consecutive times. Phil Campbell will try and end that streak on the final Friday night in October in a game that could have region and playoff implications for both teams.

Bonus Game: Vina at Tharptown

The Wildcats pulled out a 27-26 victory at Vina last year, winning their third straight meeting with the Red Devils following seven consecutive losses to begin the series. This year's meeting can't possibly be any closer, but it could be more meaningful for both teams, who hope to still be in the playoff mix come late October.

Friday, November 3

Must See: Colbert County at Russellville

The final game of the regular season will be Senior Night for the Golden Tigers, who will be seeking revenge following last year's 41-21 loss in Leighton. The Indians snapped a five-game losing streak in the series with that victory, but they haven't won at Russellville in 20 years.

New Colbert County head coach Brett Mask will be looking to become the first Indian coach to win his first meeting with Russellville since Steve Carter in 1990. Russellville will have to figure out a way to contain Colbert County tailback Kobi McCoy, who rushed for 219 yards and four touchdowns in last year's win.

Bonus Game: Hackleburg at Phil Campbell (Thursday, November 2)

Many local fans will check out both of these games, since they'll be on different nights. It's possible that some of those fans can barely remember the last time the Bobcats beat Hackleburg—a 28-20 win way back in 2002. The Panthers have won all 14 meetings since.

The 2017 high school season starts this week, so break out that seat cushion, gas up the car and get your popcorn ready. Kickoff is coming.





