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Eaglettes poised to return to glory days

By **GARY JOHNSON**
Sports Writer

Shelbyville Central's Golden Eaglettes recently wrapped up the season with a region tournament loss at Class 4A state powerhouse Bradley Central and even though the overall record might not indicate, the once national dominate program is improving.

The Eaglettes (7-17) are now with their seventh head coach since the Rick Insell era and current head coach Kyle Turnham would like nothing more but to lead the team back to the glory days of the past.

Building a strong feeder system and playing a challenging schedule are two components in doing so.

The new elementary league just finished its' second year and looks to be a huge success, Coach Turnham is in the process of building a strong AAU program and the Eaglettes played a very tough schedule this past season.

"We just finished the second year of our elementary league and we had another very successful year. We are starting our Golden Eaglette AAU program next week with a number of age groups. All of this is nothing more than investing in our young people. I'm coaching the third and fourth grade team and I will take them all the way up with me until they get into high school," Turnham said.

"We have really upgraded our schedule as well. I'm a firm believer that you get better by playing better teams. We are a better team than we were last year, there is no doubt about that."

The Eaglettes only had one senior,

Jadyn Lee, with three junior starters, Paige Blackman, Lilly Brown and Sammie Brown.

Sophomores Lanaya Young and Jaz Western were key contributors.

"Every coach wants a lot of experience on the team, for obvious reasons, and we've been building since I got here two years ago," Turnham said.

"This coming year we will be returning everybody from this team except our lone senior as well as adding players from middle schools and potential transfers. So in a building process you have to be patient and realize you have to keep an eye on what's in front of you as opposed to what's behind you. Our prospective is about being better tomorrow than we were today. We I look at the program today compared to where it was when I inherited this team, we are way ahead of where we were when I got here."

Shelbyville Central ventures into a new district next year that consist of Coffee County, Warren County, Lincoln County, Columbia and Spring Hill.

"This will still be a quality district night in and night out and we will match up with the Williamson County district in the region," Turnham said.

"Again, we are just trying to be better at the end of the day than we were the day before. This is a slow process but that's what's required to get there and stay there."

This may have not have been as successful as the team had wanted but the improvement can be seen in a number of ways and the goals set for next year will be higher.



Paige Blackburn was a steady source of offense with her shot from the perimeter this season.

Photo by Gary Johnson

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Photo by Chris Siers

Isah Alexander helped lead the Eagles from the guard position this season.



Photo by Chris Siers

Coach Kody Howard hopes the returning players next season will see a big jump in production with all the minutes logged this year.

Plenty of positives for Eagles moving forward

By **GARY JOHNSON**
Sports Writer

Even though Shelbyville Central's Golden Eagles only won two basketball games this past season, there were a number of positives that will help this team compete and win in the future.

Second-year head coach Kody Howard is excited about the direction this team is headed and feels that the feeder system that has been revamped will help lead to the success of the Golden Eagle program in the near future.

"The biggest thing is the effort our kids played with. They were learning the game and as the season went on that effort never wavered. It doesn't matter how talented a team may be, if they don't play hard and play with a lot of effort they will not be successful. These kids played with a lot of effort night in and night out and that alone is something to build off of,"

Howard said.

"We lost over 95% of our scoring from last year and we had to find some ways to score the basketball and we kind of struggled with that this year. We played a lot of kids and many of them were very young and in experienced so hopefully the experience and playing time they got this past season will make a difference next year."

It was hard to hide the lack of experience this team possessed and that is something that was noticeable late in games.

"A lot of our kids had never been in those situations before and this year was a great learning experience. Until you are thrown into the fire you don't know how a

kid is going to respond. The more meaningful reps they get, the better in the future they will respond," Howard said.

This team was blessed with a great group of seniors that helped lay a foundation for those who follow in this program.

"Our seniors, Marquis Wilson, Isah Alexander, Ty Childress and Evan Conditt, were great program kid. A great foundation that showed up day ready to work and they were never late. They were four of our top GPA's as well," Howard said.

"They will really be missed. They showed the younger cats how to go about it day by day and how to do it the right way."

With that said, the team returns some young talent.

Joe Harris has developed into a scoring threat from beyond the arch, Kyler Trice will be a force while sophomores to be Tae' Shawn Shelton and Jack Conditt are projected to be quality players. There are a number of others to watch as well.

"We will return over 90% of our scoring and these guys returning are going to be fun to watch. They work hard and will only get better and better," Howard said.

Next year Shelbyville Central will play in a new district consisting of Coffee County, Warren County, Lincoln County, Columbia and Spring Hill.

"This will be new for me since I'm not from the Middle Tennessee area. These new teams added will be a learning experience for me as well," Howard said.

The Eagles will look to improve from their 2-24 season.



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Tale of two seasons for Tigerettes

By **CHRIS SIERS**
sports@t-g.com

It was the tale of two seasons for the Marshall County Tigerettes this season.

The early-season successes that landed the Tigerettes an 11-2 record at one point couldn't be sustained as Marshall County saw an early exit in the District 8-AAA tournament.

The Tigerettes were red-hot throughout the months of November and December, highlighted by an eight-game win-streak at one point.

The biggest win of the season came in a 66-16 blowout win at Glencliff in the second game of the year.

Relying on the steady production of offense by Mashawna Ridley and Demiyah Blackman, the Tigerettes were a threat, both in scoring from the perimeter, as well as in the paint.

Throughout the season, Marshall County split games with Cornersville and the lone district win came in a 57-28 blow-out victory at Spring Hill on January 17.

But following the win against the Lady Raiders, Marshall County struggled to close out games and ended the year on an eight-game skid.

Injuries played a role in the Tigerettes' skid as Ridley was sidelined with an injury toward the end of the season.

"Mashawna is a perimeter player who is starting to go inside. She's starting to do it all. Her rebounding is really improving," Coach David Steely said. In addition to Ridley and Blackman providing a steady source of offense, night in and night out, the Tigerettes leaned on senior Kayla Keiler to run point throughout the year. Marshall County graduates Keiler and fellow senior Caroline Hollingsworth this season.



Kayla Keiler ran the Tigerette offense as the team's point guard this year.

Photo by Chris Siers

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Tigers push to region tourney

By **CHRIS SIERS**
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All season long, the Marshall County Tigers relied on the efforts of stand out point guard Jamahl Gentry and key production from Jayden Hart and Aja Jones.

The Tigers' season came in ebbs and flows as Marshall County strung together two separate, five-game win-streaks that allowed Marshall County to build a 5-5 district record, putting the Tigers firmly in the mix of the District 8-AAA race.

Marshall County survived a thriller in the district play-in game that saw the Tigers edge Lincoln County, 44-42.

The following game came against District 8-AAA champion Lawrence County in which the Wildcats were able to eke out a 58-55 win over the Tigers.

Despite falling in the district semifinals, Marshall County rebounded with a consolation victory over Spring Hill, which put the Tigers on a collision course with Region 4-AAA No. 2 seed White County.

While playing perhaps their best bas-

ketball of the season, the Tigers weren't able to match the Warriors' offensive production in the region and saw their season come to a close with a 78-62 loss.

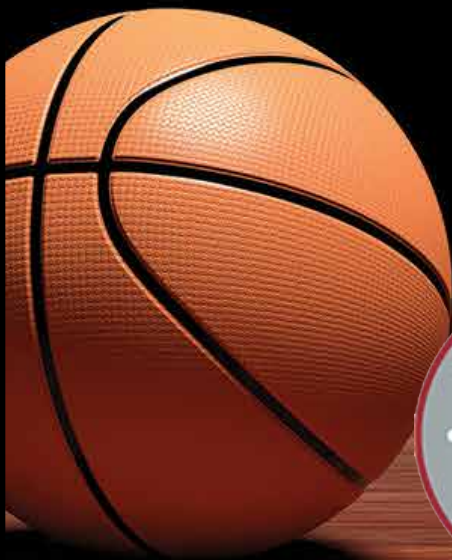
All season long, White County broke into the 70-point barrier and despite the Tigers' best offensive efforts, Marshall County came up short in the region.

Throughout the year, Marshall County played a deep bench, which led the way to several wins, according to coach Lavon King.

"That's the good thing about playing a lot of kids, we can go in swarms, press the ball and force some turnovers. That's the good thing as far as what we try to do in forcing turnovers and getting it into an up and down game," he said. Marshall County returns a large portion of its roster and loses just Hart and Kintarius Morris from the 2022-2023 team.

Marcus O'Neal gave the Tigers depth in scoring in the 2022-2023 season.

Photo by Chris Siers



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Viqueens reach state tournament semifinals



Photo by Chris Siers

The Viqueens celebrate after winning their state quarterfinal matchup against Scotts Hill on the floor of the Murphy Center.

By **RICKEY CLARDY**
Sports Writer

After missing the TSSAA Class 2A state tournament by one game in a sectional loss the previous season, the goal for Coach Cody Pierce and the Community Viqueens in the 2022-23 season was to get a win in a sectional game and become the third Viqueen team to make the trip to Murfreesboro for the Big Dance.

With a senior-laden team consisting of M.J. Simmons, Haley Mitchell, Zoey Dixon, Addison Brothers, Shelby Cawthon, and Jacey Collier, there were high hopes for the Viqueens reaching their mark.

The season started off with two wins for the Viqueens, but three consecutive losses put Community under .500.

The Viqueens were able to right the ship and knock off seven straight wins to up their record to 9-3 before the Christmas break with an appearance in the Smoky Mountain Classic looming in late December.

Community won its first game over 3A opponent Soddy Daisy in the Classic and met another 3A team, Creek Wood, in the semifinals.

The Viqueens fell to Creek Wood, but followed the loss with a win over 4A Beech that gave Community an 11-4 record heading into the new year.

With a stingy defense and a potent offense that featured the inside game of Simmons and Cawthon and the outside shooting of Mitchell, Dixon, Brothers, and freshman Anna Haskins, the Viqueens played consistent basketball and won their six district games to get the number one seed for the District 7-AA tournament.

Along the way, Mitchell reached the Viqueen 1,000-point club.

The Viqueens went on the road to Chapel Hill for the district tournament. Community continued its dominant play with wins over Grundy County and Forrest to claim its second straight district championship.

With the region tournament on their own floor, the Viqueens had a chance to advance to the state tournament without having to leave Unionville.

The Viqueens started in grand style with wins over Whites Creek and Pearl Cohn, which set up a rematch with East Nashville in the Region 4-AA championship.

The Viqueens were true to the test, and defeated East Nashville 70-52 to win their second-straight region championship and the opportunity to host a home game in the sectional against the Smith County Lady Owls.

Simmons also set a milestone by reaching the 2,000-point mark for her career.

A big crowd welcomed the Viqueens for the sectional.

Community looked ready to waltz in its

game after taking a huge first-quarter lead.

But the Lady Owls were not ready to throw in the towel and came back to tie the game at the half.

Community led for most of the second half and looked ready to meet its goal of a state tournament before a Smith County trey in the final seconds of regulation sent the game to overtime.

The Lady Owls took the early lead in the overtime, but Simmons took over with a field goal and four free throws to send the Viqueens to a 62-55 win and a trip to Murfreesboro for the Class AA state tournament.

With a large part of Unionville in attendance, the Viqueens took on Scotts Hill in the quarterfinals.

Community trailed by six points in the final quarter, but the Viqueens increased their intensity on defense to create three consecutive turnovers to get back in the game.

Simmons hit two free throws with 3.4 seconds left and the Viqueens dodged a bullet as Scotts Hill could only make one of three free throws in the final second as the Viqueens advanced to the semifinals against the defending 2A champion Westview Lady Chargers with a 53-52 win.

The pace was slow in the first half as the Viqueens kept close to the Lady Chargers. Westview took advantage of some cold Community shooting from the outside and used some clutch three-point shooting in the second half to pull away and end the Viqueen hopes of a state championship.

The loss ended the Viqueen season at 27-7.

Many of the Viqueen seniors, who had played with each other as early as kindergarten, saw their storied careers on the hard court end with the state tournament appearance.

"This means our hard work has paid off," Simmons said. "All of the blood, sweat, and tears."

"It's all paid off to get to this moment," Simmons added.

"We've won a lot of close games with some crazy endings to some games," Pierce said. "We've got a lot of fight."

Pierce and the Viqueens also got to see a fan base that rooted on Community to the end.

"It's pretty awesome. When I first started coaching we've always had great crowds," Pierce said.

"But every year I felt like the crowds got bigger, and bigger, and bigger."

"They know how hard these girls work. They know the sacrifices they've made," Pierce added.

"It means a lot to be a Viqueen on the basketball court," Pierce said. "They make a lot of sacrifices and that's why the community shows up."

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Vikings struggle without leading scorer

By **RICKEY CLARDY**
Sports Writer

A big part of the 2022-23 Community Viking basketball season can be attributed to a football game from September 16th, two months before the start of the regular season.

On that night, Maki Fleming, the leading scorer on the basketball team from the previous season, injured his leg late in the game.

The injury would sideline the junior for the rest of the football season, but would also prevent Fleming from playing for most of the basketball campaign.

The loss of Fleming, and some other key seniors from the previous season would be felt by Coach Robbie Davis and the Vikings as Community put together a 2-26 record.

“We started the season with no one having 100 career points, so it was hard to find consistency night in and night out,” Davis said.

“Half the roster was sophomores and

under so our youth and inexperience really showed.”

The Vikings started the season with a 1-point loss to state tournament participant Fayetteville and lost an overtime battle to Eagleville after a successful Eagleville three-pointer in the waning seconds of regulation prevented a Community win.

As the season progressed, the Vikings had trouble finding consistency each night.

“Our inconsistency to make easy shots as a team put us behind in games,” Davis said. “We continued to miss shots at point-blank range.”

“Night after night, we did not block out and were not strong with the basketball in traffic,” Davis added.

With a senior-laden squad consisting of Jacob Flannagan, Cole Crockett, Emery Smith, Ramon Hernandez, Corey Paterick, and Dallas Grooms, the Vikings played their best game of the season to date with a win over Cornersville in January.

“For the first time all season, we got to the line twice as much as our opponent,” Davis said.

“We actually made more free throws than they attempted which is a first for this season.”

“No one felt the pressure of winning more than these kids, so I was happy they finally were able to come into a locker room after a win,” Davis added.

With help from sophomore starters Landon Lovvorn and Jason Cullum, the Vikings carried their momentum of the win over to the next game on the road in a seven-point loss against district opponent Grundy County.

One week later, the Vikings played close for three quarters against district champion Cascade.

“We matched them in field goals and three-pointers made. The difference in the game was the free throw line,” Davis said.

With the start of the district tournament came the appearance of Fleming on the basketball floor for the first time in the season.

The Vikings could not pull the upset, but were within single digits of Cascade

late in the third quarter in the district semifinal. Having Fleming on the court paid dividends for the Vikings.

“He is the team leader and it’s been hard on him sitting all season and watching,” Davis said.

“You could tell he has been out of game action awhile, but his fire and competitive nature is contagious.”

The Vikings picked up their second win of the season with a consolation win over Forrest, with Fleming being named to the All-Tournament team.

With the third place District 7-AA finish, the Vikings traveled to Whites Creek for an opening round game of the Region 4-AA tournament.

A slow start and the quickness of Whites Creek were too much for the Vikings as Community saw its season come to a close.

The Vikings will look for a healthy Fleming and the advancement of several freshmen and sophomores on this year’s team to help Community next season.



Photo by Rickey Clardy

Senior Jacob Flannagan was one of the key senior leaders during the 2022-2023 season.

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Lady Rockets overcome multitude of injuries in run to region

By **CHRIS SIERS**
sports@t-g.com

All season long, the Forrest Lady Rockets were fighting an uphill battle with injuries to key players.

Even in the face of adversity and losing various players for the entire season, to losing players for various stints, Forrest fought its way to a second-place finish in the District 7-AA standings and forged its way to the Region 4-AA semifinals for the second-straight year.

Any high school coach will state there are three parts to the season: before Christmas, after Christmas and the postseason.

For the first part of the season, it was an all-out struggle for the Lady Rockets, who had to adjust to a much different lineup than anticipated in the preseason.

The Lady Rockets won their season-opener Hall of Fame game, but then went just 2-10 through the Christmas break.

After losing the majority of their size on the roster in Cadence Chapman, the Lady Rockets were forced to utilize players to play non-traditional roles, particularly in the post.

Once the calendar turned to January, Forrest began to click on the court and the Lady Rockets went 7-4 leading up to the District 7-AA tournament, guided by the stellar senior class for coach Hal Murrell.

“There’s going to be some big shoes to fill. I thought we had overcome a lot this year. Cadence Chapman, our starting post player has been out all year; Camreigh Warner has been hurt and she has been 90% of the year; Josie Brown, a good three-point shooter, injured her ankle again in practice; (Kaylin) Pope has been hurt most of the year. I know it hasn’t showed, but she’s been going to therapy for a shoulder injury,” he said.

Forrest made quick work of Cascade in the District 7-AA semifinals, after locking up the No. 2 seed for the tournament, and advanced to face Community in the district finals.

After falling to Community, the Lady Rockets rebounded with a huge, 53-29 win over Stratford in the Region 4-AA quarterfinal to qualify for the region semifinals for the second-straight year.

But for the second-straight year, the Lady Rockets had the tough-luck draw of facing East Nashville in an elimination game and despite falling to the Lady Eagles a season ago in a blowout fashion, Forrest showed much more determination and grit in the 2023 semifinal meeting.

“I thought the game plan was good. I thought we handled their pressure and physicality. Even until halftime, it was an eight-point game. They went on that run at the beginning of the third quarter and kind of stretched it out and we ran out of gas. I couldn’t be more proud



Photo by Chris Siers

Sophomore Kinslee Inlow was the go-to three-point shooter for the Lady Rockets this season.

of the season and the effort just to get here. We’re one game away from reaching sub-state,” Murrell said. All season long, Forrest relied on senior Macyn Kirby to not just direct the Lady Rockets on the court as the floor general, but often led her team in scoring.

She eventually was named to the All-Region 4-AA team.

But Megan Mealer, Carli Warner and Sam Hopkins also made their impact on the team this season as well.

“You’ve got two girls who have signed college softball scholarships and Megan Mealer is the hardest working kid and Sam (Hopkins) does everything we ask her to do, whether it’s a guard position or a post position. She is the first one leading the cheers on the sideline for us. It’s a team effort. I told them in the locker room I was proud of them. I told them I loved them like they were my own daughters. They have done everything I have asked out of a senior group. I think they have started to turn the culture back to where Lady Rockets basketball ought to be,” Murrell said. Forrest loses a lot of senior leadership from the 2022-2023 season, but returns a bevy of young talent Murrell says is ripe for filling the shoes of the seniors departing this season. “We’re going to be young next year, but I think the sky is possibly the limit. I’ve got a really good group of young girls we’ve pulled up. Hopefully we can get in the gym and get them stronger in the weight room and try to get past this game,” Murrell said.

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Tough season for Rockets ends in region

By **CHRIS SIERS**
sports@t-g.com

All season long, the Forrest Rockets struggled on the offensive end of the court.

Where they didn't struggle was in the effort department, which had the Rockets in position to win several games through-

out the season, but just couldn't get over the hump.

Forrest claimed its first win over the season against county rival Cornersville in just the second game of the year, but struggled in several close games throughout the month of December.

It wasn't until January 13 that the

Rockets were able to grind out their second win of the season, which came against Community in a 50-47 thriller.

Three weeks later, the Rockets capped their sweep over the Vikings with a 61-51 win over the Vikings, to ensure the No. 3 seed in the District 7-AA tournament.

But diving into the other games, Forrest socked Cascade twice and stood toe-to-toe with the Champs, who enjoyed the bulk of the season ranked in the AP top 10 Class 2A poll.

"We went toe-to-toe with them twice, we just have come up short against them both times. The guys have played hard. They're a good team. They have guys that can catch and can shoot. We just came up short. We had a chance there at the end, again, to win it," Rocket coach Shane Chapman said. Twice, the Rockets played Cascade within a single possession, but twice, the Champions were able to escape with wins over Forrest. All season long, it was senior Davin Porter who was the steady source of offense for the Rockets. With Porter having the most size on the court for the Rockets on any given night,

it became a chess match to create positive offensive possessions throughout the season. After playing the Champions to a 39-36 final score in the regular season finale, Forrest was matched up with Grundy County in the District 7-AA semifinals. Grundy County, a team renowned for shooting at a high clip from the perimeter, beat Forrest and set the Rockets on a matchup for third-place in the district against Community. With the Vikings missing a key component in their roster all season with an injury, it was Community who emerged with a 48-42 win over Forrest in the district consolation game. Even with the losses, Chapman never doubted his team's effort in the coaching staff's vision for the program. "Our guys are super locked into what we're trying to do. We're trying all kinds of things defensively. Our size has been our biggest downfall all year, not having a big, but we've got guys that can cut to the rim and some guys who can get the open shot to go in," he said.

Forrest ended the season with a loss to then-ranked No. 1 East Nashville in the Region 4-AA quarterfinals.



Photo by Chris Siers

Josh Rumley helped give the Rockets depth at the guard position this season.



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Champs' run filled with plenty of highs

By **WILL CARTER**
Sports Writer

Before the Cascade Champions tipped off the 2022-2023 season, head coach Chris Lawson set a goal to break through sectionals and earn a trip to "The Glass House" for the TSSAA Division I-AA State Tournament.

Although they weren't able to fulfill that goal with their season coming to an end in sectionals, there were many magical moments and achievements throughout the season to look back on and appreciate.

The loss to York Institute was the Champions second appearance in sectionals in the three years that Lawson has been with the program with the first coming in his debut season.

Six seniors will move on and go their separate ways after graduation, leaving behind a legacy and "tradition" to remember and for future teams to look up to.

That group includes Eli Elliott, Jayden Gulick, Thomas Gentry, Jackson Davis, Jacob Curl, and Lucas Clanton.

"In this line of work, it is easy to get attached to specific groups," Lawson said. "For me and my family, this is our third year here at Cascade High School and the seniors we have this year were sophomores when we came in. I feel like they have done a great job of continuing the tradition of producing strong basketball players/teams at Cascade High School and also have set the expectation for future Champions."

Cascade finished the season with a 27-7 record while staying undefeated in District 7-AA play.

During the season, the Champions went on two separate streaks of winning 10 games with one before and after the holi-

days.

Their stellar play led to the top spot in the district heading into the tournament held at Forrest High School, and they handled business on their way to their second straight District Championship.

Cascade then advanced to the Region 4-AA tournament at Community High School where they cruised to the championship game with a 81-67 win over LEAD Academy and a 73-54 win over Whites Creek.

In the championship game, they met Pearl Cohn in a rematch of last year's semi final that saw the Firebirds advance and the Champions' season end.

While Pearl Cohn couldn't end Cascade's season this time around, they were able to keep the Champions at bay throughout the contest, and Cascade walked away with runner-up honors.

For Lawson, the accolades and awards are great, but it was the moments and time they had together as a team that he will cherish the most.

"This season, one of my main goals was to enjoy and cherish every day and moment that we were together," he said. "I tried to constantly remind the guys in our program of this. I am extremely proud of how hard everyone worked and how much time everyone devoted to our team and program. It was so much fun to coach this group because of how passionate they are."

Lawson was also appreciative of the support the Champions received for the duration of the season from the Champion faithful.

"It was equally fun to coach in an environment night in and night out where we had great fan support which is a compliment in itself to our program. The Cascade Community and Bedford County in gener-



Photo by Chris Siers

Senior Lucas Clanton finished his career just 44 points shy of setting the school scoring record for Cascade.

al showed up for us consistently all season and I am so grateful for that," he said.

And Cascade fans had a lot to cheer for outside of the season's accolades.

During their two separate 10-game win streaks, the Champions performed at a high level that saw them reach the century mark against Huntland in January, Lucas Clanton surpass the 1000 career point mark, Thomas Gentry knock down eight three-pointers for a career high of 36 points, and Tucker McGee explode for 22 points off the bench in the Region 4-AA Semifinals after his role expanded at the

end of the season.

Lawson was grateful for his time leading the talented group of Champions and their hard work throughout their careers and this season.

"It has been so much fun watching them develop and mature into young men over the past three years. They spent countless hours in the gym and worked extremely hard. They have become like family to us and we cherish that bond. My children have been able to spend a lot of time watching this group and dreaming of one day being out there on the court," he said.

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Season of growth for Lady Champs



Photo by Chris Siers

First-year coach Janie Demonbreum saw significant growth from her team as the season progressed. That growth led to a third-place finish in the District 7-AA tournament.

By WILL CARTER

Sports Writer

Throughout the 2022-2023 season one of the biggest challenges for the Cascade Lady Champions was finding their identity as a young team under the direction of first-year head coach Janie Demonbreum, and while they finished with a 3-25 record, there were many positives for Demonbreum as she looks towards the future of the program.

“When taking this job in May of last year, I knew moving this program in the right direction would take time and consistency from myself,” she said. “I was interested to see how the girls would battle the ups and the downs that we would face. There were so many positives for this season even though they weren’t on the scoreboard. I knew this year was about laying the foundation for our program, and I feel like we have a good solid base to build on for the years to come with more changes coming.”

The Lady Champions opened the season with a 55-54 victory at Hampshire, but then went on a 21-game skid before earn-

ing their second win of the season at home against Grundy County.

In the 58-43 win over the Lady ‘Jackets, Cascade took the lead just under the four minute mark of the first quarter, and held onto it for the remainder of the contest as Sophie Ray dropped in a game-high 29 points.

Securing the win was sweet for the Lady Champs, but doing it in front of their home fans made it even better after losing at Grundy a few nights before.

“The girls had everyone in the gym cheering for them, and the student section gave them so much energy that night,” Demonbreum said. “That atmosphere is what I wanted all year long for those girls. We were excited to get that win because it was a ‘How do you respond to losing?’ game.”

The two squads met again in the District 7-AA consolation game at Forrest High School, and the Lady Champs held their own again in the 45-33 win to finish third in the tournament.

Ray couldn’t duplicate her previous performance as she was guarded heavily by the Lady ‘Jackets, so the underclass-

men pair of Isabella Rhodes and Suzanna Crews carried the load with 15 and 13 points respectively, and Kaegan Young added eight of her own with key free throws down the stretch.

Their play throughout the contest and season showed that the young core was showing growth in a challenging year.

“There are people in this area that have seen Sophie take over in ball games and she 100% has the ability to do that, but I’ve got girls who can step up and make shots when Sophie is being guarded,” Demonbreum said after the district tournament win. “That’s so much growth for us. It makes me happy that we have multiple girls step up and score.”

In the middle of their 21-game skid, Cascade had an 11-day break in their schedule during the holiday season which allowed them to spend some time together off the court without basketball being the focus, and it proved to be time well spent as the Lady Champs began making strides over the second half of the season.

“There were so many positives for this

season even though they weren’t on the scoreboard. I felt like after Christmas this group really came together as a team and we started to know our roles within our program,” Demonbreum said. “It was nice to see them laughing and getting along during that time because we were all down about how the season was going. Seeing the girls be kids together was just fun for everyone.”

Above anything else, Demonbreum was proud of how her youthful team stayed positive and fought throughout the season given the results.

“It’s easy to keep fighting and playing hard when you are used to winning every game night and when the crowd is behind you consistently. It’s harder to find the desire to go out and play every night when you are on a 20-game losing streak and you want more for yourself and the team,” she said. “They fought every game until the buzzer and near the end of the year we saw that mentality pay off for them with a few wins and close ball games.”

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Perseverance leads Feet to state semis

By **WILL CARTER**
Sports Writer

Head coach Micah Williams described the Webb Feet's basketball season in one word – perseverance.

That perseverance was on display throughout the season as they opened with a 1-3 record in the Cougar Classic at Centennial with their lone win being a 76-74 victory over Independence High School, who currently sits on a 31-4 record and will be playing in the Class 4A State Tournament.

Webb then went on a five-game win streak with four being over DII-A District 3 opponents before losing seven of their next 10 games, and three being decided by one possession.

But they dug deep and bounced back again to close out the regular season on a five-game win streak and secure the top seed in the district tournament where they defeated Columbia Academy 62-55 in the championship game.

The win streak came to an end in the DII-A Middle Region Championship when Clarksville Academy topped the Feet 72-63, but Webb had already secured a spot in the DII-A State Tournament.

In the opening round in front of their home crowd, the Feet sent no. 5 Boyd Buchanan home with a 56-51 victory, and traveled to no. 3 Lausanne for the quarterfinals where they upset the Lynx 48-46 on a last second shot to advance to the Final Four.

While the Feet didn't come away with a victory to advance to the state championship game, they battled to the end in the 68-62 loss to no. 7 Notre Dame.

It was Webb's first trip to the Final Four since the 2018-2019 season.



Photo by Will Carter

Stephen Olowoniyi was one of the key leaders that led the Feet to the Division II Class A state semifinals this season. He also reached 1,000 points in scoring during his senior season.

"I had always felt that we had the pieces and a chance to be a State Tournament/Final Four team," Williams said. "For us it was all about putting those pieces together, building chemistry with a young core group of guys and developing. I thought throughout the season we did that. Our guys showed a lot of maturity and growth throughout the season."

The Feet's run to the Final Four was

one Williams, the players, and the Webb community won't soon forget.

"My favorite moments would have to be winning the district championship and winning the state tournament quarterfinal game against Lausanne to make it to the Final Four at TN Tech," Williams said.

"Not just about winning those games, but how we won them, and to see my guys celebrate each other and experience that

team success."

Webb was led by six seniors in Stephen Olowoniyi, Hector Larrison, Justin Burrows, Julian Whitey, Sylvaughn Armbrister, Theon Missick, and managers Gavin McBee and Knox Wimberly.

Olowoniyi highlighted that group as the Feet's big man in the middle with his ferocious defensive and offensive abilities which led to him reaching the 1,000 point career milestone in their postseason matchup with Boyd Buchanan.

"Those guys will truly be missed, not only as basketball players or managers, but young men in our Webb community. I'm extremely proud of them all and what they've accomplished.," Williams said.

"Those guys (McBee and Wimberly) went above and beyond for our team and deserve a lot of credit for what they do for our team behind the scenes. Being able to be district regular season & tournament champions, region tournament runner-up, and make a State tournament Final Four appearance is an accomplishment not only our seniors should be proud of and remember, but our entire team as well."

Reflecting on this season and looking to the next, Williams emphasized that basketball season is a long and winding road that takes focus and hard work every day to succeed.

"It's a marathon, not a sprint and lots of things can happen throughout the year," he said.

"The biggest lesson of the season would probably be that understanding that a few games does not make or break a season. So you have to continue to work each and every day on becoming a better coach, player, teammate, and attack each day with a positive mindset on how you can make the team better."

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'Exceptional' season for Lady Feet highlighted by 3rd title

By **WILL CARTER**
Sports Writer

After returning the majority of last season's core group that contributed to the second leg of back-to-back state championships, it was going to be hard to keep the Webb Lady Feet from returning to the Division II-A State Tournament for a shot at a three-peat, and that proved to be true as the Lady Feet capped off a 32-4 season with a 73-43 victory over MTCS in the title game for their third straight.

While their on-court play was a sight to see throughout the season, it was their off the court actions and character that Matt Shewmake enjoyed the most.

"Anytime you are a part of winning teams there is obviously joy that comes with it, but this team is made up of extremely exceptional people. Some of the kindest, most thoughtful, loving, strong, and powerful young women you'll ever meet. They also happen to be really talented players, and just really privileged to be a part and lead them," Shewmake said. "It speaks volumes to the culture that the first team bought in to and created. This core group took it to another level because of their commitment and unique superpowers."

Among the six that are graduating from this season's squad, five will be heading to their respective colleges to compete at the next level.

Angelica Velez and Aalyah Del Rosario will continue their careers together at Louisiana State University as a part of the no. 1 recruiting class in the country for women's basketball.

Del Rosario was also named to the McDonald's All-American team which recognizes the nation's top high school players.

Rhema Collins will join the duo in the Southeastern Conference with her commitment to Ole Miss while Bree Robinson and Lauren Rust head to different parts of the country in Michigan State and Pittsburgh University respectively.

Those five led the way for the Lady Feet throughout the season, and were rewarded with a national ranking at the close of the season as the No. 13 team in the country, as stated in the SCNext Top 25.

Even with the national spotlight on Webb during the season, Shewmake said it wasn't difficult to keep his team focused on the task at hand.

"We lived by the mantra 'Humble enough to prepare, confident enough to

perform,'" he said. "Pat Riley talks about 'the disease of more' infecting repeat teams. It was the biggest challenge, but with the exceptional women on this team, it wasn't that big of a challenge at all because they all wanted the same thing. I credit that to the character of the players and our culture."

Outside of winning their third state championship in as many years, a couple moments stuck out to Shewmake during Webb's monumental season.

One of those being the game they played in Washington D.C. against the preseason no. 1 ranked team in the country as a part of ESPN's Invitational, Sidwell Friends School, who finished the year as the no. 2 ranked team in the country.

The Lady Feet lost 52-50 at the buzzer, but it showed Shewmake and his team that they belonged with the best.

"Being recognized by ESPN as one of the top teams in the country, and a chance to play the preseason no. 1 team in the country on their home floor, in our nation's capital, was a cool moment," he said. "Even though we lost at the buzzer, it was a surreal moment where I knew we belonged at the summit of high school girls' Basketball."

A large part of the Lady Feet's success came from their core group of exceptional players, but they were also lined from top-to-bottom with players that could come in and make plays at any given time, which proved to be a trend throughout the season.

Competitive practices helped to build that depth into what it became throughout the season.

"They go out there and play against each other every day, and some days one will best the other and vice versa. It pushes people to get better every time we touch the floor. Our secret sauce has kind of been that anyone can be the leading scorer on any night. That's a great position to be in as a coach," Shewmake said after Webb's 83-23 win over Fayette Academy where 11 players contributed to the final score.

However, the biggest win of them all was being able to be a refuge for junior Daria Biryk and her family as they watched their home country, Ukraine, be attacked in the name of war.

"Having our program be a family and escape for a human being fleeing a war torn country meant a lot," Shewmake said. "Seeing the smiles our players all had while with each other, that's what this is all about."



Photo by Chris Siers
Aalyah Del Rosario was named the Division II Class A state tournament MVP for her efforts in leading the Lady Feet to their third-straight state championship.



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Photo by Chris Siers

Alicia Polk was named the District 9-A Player of the Year for her role in Cornersville's strong run through the month of January, leading up to the postseason.

Lady 'Dawgs ride hot January to postseason

By **CHRIS SIERS**
sports@t-g.com

The sport of high school basketball is a game of ebbs and flows and perhaps no Class 1A team in the mid-state had a hotter January than the Cornersville Lady Bulldogs.

With a core group, led by senior Alicia Polk, the Lady 'Dawgs went on a tear through the month of January that saw Cornersville beat teams for the first time in several years.

After an 0-3 start to the district slate in a loaded 9-A schedule, Cornersville responded with wins over Moore County, Huntland, Fayetteville and a huge upset at Eagleville, which put the Lady 'Dawgs firmly in the mix of the 9-A race.

"We believed we could beat anybody. We just got hot and beat teams we haven't beaten in a long, long time. It was a fun streak to go on. They battled back from 0-3 and won four in-a-row," Lady Bulldog coach Hayden McMahon said.

After standing toe-to-toe with the bulk of the 9-A schedule, which included a win over Huntland, who played in the Class 1A sectional, Cornersville felt like a team of destiny, but due to tiebreakers, the Lady 'Dawgs lost a coin flip and was forced to play Eagleville in the District 9-A play-in game.

In that key, win or go home game to open the postseason, shots simply wouldn't fall for Cornersville and what was poised to be a promising postseason run came to an abrupt close with a 36-27 loss to the Lady Eagles.

"We couldn't get the shots to go down. I think they wanted it more than us in the first half, getting loose balls and rebounds. You can't let that happen in big games," McMahon said.

Polk, who was the regular season District 9-A Player of the Year, was

marked all game long and the Lady 'Dawgs just couldn't get enough auxiliary support on the offensive end to overcome Eagleville.

But with Polk marked, Ady Gentry and Anna Wood were able to deliver a handful of key baskets that kept Cornersville well-within striking distance of the Lady Eagles.

"They knew who they wanted to take away. I wanted to feed the ball to Ady, and Anna had some big shots. She wasn't hitting her three, but she started getting to the bucket and hit some floaters," McMahon said.

In the end, the Lady Eagles hit just enough shots to pull away and keep Cornersville at bay to end the Lady 'Dawgs' season.

Cornersville loses just one senior in Polk, but her value to the program can't be ignored.

"She's going to be missed. She's a big piece. She was big piece when I got here. She bought in and she worked outside of here. She came in to work every day and put in extra time. She's a great teammate and great friend to these players. I'm wishing her the best in college," McMahon said. Even with losing Polk, Cornersville returns the bulk of its roster that saw significant playing time during the 2022-2023 season.

"We just have to buy into what we've done so far and keep building on it. I think we've got some really good freshmen that will come in and help these juniors and sophomore. I think we can be a really dangerous team next year. We've got two really good post players. We've got a ball handler and some shooters," McMahon said.

"I think we're going to be OK. And we move districts, which will probably help us out. I honestly think we should be really good."

Bulldogs show growth in 1st year with new coach

By **CHRIS SIERS**
sports@t-g.com

First-year Cornersville coach Dakota Brown had his hands full stepping into a new program, ripe with talent up and down the roster.

While the Bulldogs were able to string together a handful of December wins, the regular season district slate was an all-out battle that saw Cornersville struggle to find its footing.

“We had a pretty good start to the year

and after Christmas in district play, we ended up losing most of those. Then we went to Moore County and got a big win and then came in here tonight and fought to the bitter end,” Brown said.

Cornersville was slated to play the District 9-A play-in game against Moore County and the Raiders needed every second of regulation to pull away from the Bulldogs.

With big men Kel Ford and Ben Franklin dominating in the paint, Moore County was forced to rely on the perimeter shooting and if not for a teardrop corner three-pointer as time expired, the District 9-A play-in game could have had a different outcome.

“Both of those kids are big kids and great assets to have. Both of them have worked their tails off. Kel Ford has made tremendous gains in the last two or three weeks,” Brown said following the final game of the season.

Cornersville graduates just one senior in Carter Neat, who was as valuable to the team as anyone throughout the season.

“He still showed up to practice and worked his tail off every day,” Brown said.

Brown took over the Bulldog program late in the hiring cycle and didn’t have a full summer slate with his team, setting the Bulldogs behind the eight-ball, as many of the players were fully involved with football preparations.

With his inaugural season at the helm in the books, Brown’s focus now shifts to organizing a full summer with the team, working on everything from hitting the weight room, to summer camps and building fundamentals for the Cornersville program to take the next step.

“We’re going to hit some camps and do some more team building stuff. Really just need to hammer down some fundamental skills and get these kids where we want them to be next year,” Brown said.

With the bulk of the team getting valuable playing minutes throughout the season, and the majority returning next year, excitement is building within the Bulldog program.

“I’m super excited about the future of this team. In our starting lineup tonight, there wasn’t a senior out there. Definitely have a lot to build on for the future,” Brown said.



Photos by Chris Siers

ABOVE: Blaine Woodard came on strong towards the end of the season and gave the Bulldogs extra depth at the guard position.

RIGHT: Kel Ford turned it on late in the season and during the District 9-A play in game, gave the Bulldogs key minutes.





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