

NCAA BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT RESULTS:

VIRGINIA 71, GARDNER-WEBB 56 ... LIBERTY 80, MISSISSIPPI STATE 76 ... VIRGINIA TECH 66, SAINT LOUIS 52

OMG, FLAMES WIN

On its fourth tourney trip, LU finally advances



LU's Caleb Homesley reacts after scoring during the Flames' victory over Mississippi State in the East Regional on Friday in San Jose, California.

Homesley takes charge in second half

By Damien Sordelett
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SAN JOSE, Calif. — Caleb Homesley said he “played confident” during a five-minute stretch when he took over and scored 14 points in an eight-possession stretch to will Liberty back into the lead against Mississippi State.

Others weren't so nonchalant about the redshirt junior's ability to become the most dynamic player on the SAP Center court.

Flames coach Ritchie McKay said it was special. Keenan Gumbs, a graduate student, called it ridiculous.

However you sum it up, Homesley made sure Liberty kept its dancin' shoes on for at least one more round of the NCAA Tournament.

The 6-foot-6 Homesley scored a career-high 30 points, including the 14 points he tallied in a stretch that helped the Flames overcome a double-digit deficit, and Liberty claimed a thrilling 80-76 over Mississippi State in an East Region tilt in the Round of 64.

“That was unreal,” Gumbs said of Homesley's performance. “If you saw the look in his eyes, you would have known what he was about to do. He put us on his back.”

The 12th-seeded Flames (29-6) won an NCAA Tournament game for the first time and advance to Sunday's second round against Virginia Tech at 7:10 p.m. and will be televised on TBS.



Homesley dunks against Mississippi State in Friday night's first-round game.

“I don't think that we're done yet,” Homesley said. “I think our guys believe that whenever we step into a venue that we're going to win the game.”

The prospect of continuing its season looked dim for Liberty when the fifth-seeded Bulldogs (23-11) took a 63-53 lead with on Lamar Peters' layup with 7:18 remaining.

McKay called his penultimate timeout, and Homesley answered the bell almost immediately.

He scored six points in a 30-second stretch as the Flames cut the deficit to seven, and then tallied eight points in a four-possession span, highlighted by a contested straightaway 3-pointer with 2:36 remaining that put Liberty ahead 69-67.

“I think we felt like we could come back if we started valuing each possession,” McKay said. “... I just think it shows the character of our group.”

The run capped an eight-possession stretch in which Homesley scored 14 points and made all four of his shots.

He made 7 of his final 8 shots on his way to a 10-of-16 shooting performance. The Indian Trail, North Carolina, native scored 22 points of Liberty's 45 second-half points.

“I think that I just played confident,” Homesley said. “I think any shot that I take is going to go in. It just happened tonight that they were falling.”

The Bulldogs took the lead back on Robert Woodard's free throws with 1:37 left, but the Flames immediately answered on Lovell Cabbil's deep 3-pointer with 76 seconds left.

Liberty didn't trail again after Cabbil's triple.

“That was the biggest shot of the game,” Mississippi State junior guard Tyson Carter

SEE **FLAMES** | B5



UVA's Ty Jerome shoots over Gardner-Webb's Jose Perez during Friday's South Regional game in Columbia, South Carolina.

No upset this year for Cavs

After a sluggish start, UVA cruises to win over Gardner-Webb

By Mike Barber
Richmond Times-Dispatch

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Cool, calm and collected didn't work for Virginia in the first half.

» More NCAA Tournament. So with a raucous crowd roaring for another stunning upset, the Cavaliers turned fiery.

Sophomore forward De'Andre Hunter and junior guard Ty Jerome led a big second-half surge as top-seeded UVA overcame 16th-seeded Gardner-Webb 71-56 on Friday at Colonial Life Arena.

“There's no hiding it. That pressure's real. For us, it was so much about keeping calm, keeping calm,” Jerome said. “We forgot to play with that edge, that little fire.”

Last year, Virginia became the first-ever No. 1 seed to lose in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. And for a half, the Bulldogs looked as if they might join UMBC as the only No. 16 seeds to win NCAA tourney games.

UVA (30-3) struggled with turnovers and 3-point shooting in the first half and fell behind by 14 points. It went to the locker room down 36-30 to the Big South tournament champions.

But the Cavaliers outscored Gardner-Webb 41-20 in the second half, with Hunter scoring 17 of his 23 points after the break. They'll take on ninth-seeded Oklahoma, a 95-72 winner over eighth-seeded Mississippi, in Sunday's second round.

At halftime, coach Tony Bennett had a clear message he wanted his staff to deliver to the team.

“I said, ‘Uplift them,’ and we talked about, ‘Don't panic, but

SEE **UVA** | B5

Tech advances after back-to-back first-round losses

By Mark Berman
The Roanoke Times

SAN JOSE, Calif. — For the first time in 12 years, the Virginia Tech men's basketball team has won a game in the NCAA Tournament.

After suffering first-round losses the past two years, the fourth-seeded

Hokies avoided another early exit Friday by fending off 13th-seeded Saint Louis 66-52 at the SAP Center.

Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 20 points for Virginia Tech (25-8), which won an NCAA Tournament game for the first time since beating Illinois in the first round in 2007.

Saint Louis (22-13) was

trying to become the fourth double-digit seed to win in Friday's quadruple-header at the SAP Center, joining 13th-seeded UC Irvine, 12th-seeded Oregon and 12th-seeded Liberty.

The Hokies will meet Liberty in the second round at 7:10 p.m. Sunday. Tech beat Liberty 86-70 last November in a preseason exhibition.

Leading Saint Louis 9-6, the Hokies went on a 10-0 run to build a 19-6 cushion with 10:50 to go in the first half. Tech point guard Justin Robinson was on the court for the final eight points of that run.

Robinson came off the

SEE **TECH** | B5



INSIDE

» Danielle Edwards and the Clemson Tigers beat South Dakota to advance to the second round of the NCAA women's tournament.

B4

SOUTH REGIONAL

Oklahoma hammers Mississippi

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Rashard Odomes and Christian James scored 20 points apiece, Kristian Doolittle had 19 points and matched a career-high with 15 rebounds and No. 9 seed Oklahoma blitzed Mississippi from the start in a 95-72 victory Friday in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

The Sooners will face Virginia on Sunday in the second round.

It was a start more often seen by Oklahoma's high-octane football team. The Sooners (20-13) scored on eight of their first nine possessions — the only miss was an alley-oop — and led 12-0 less than three minutes in.

Oklahoma didn't let up. The Sooners led by 17 at halftime and their 95 points were the most this season.

The Sooners weren't expected to be in the tournament after losing one-and-done phenom Trae Young, now playing for the Atlanta Hawks. They lost five in a row in the middle of the season, went 4-8 in their final 12 games and lost the Big 12 Tournament opener to 15-20 West Virginia.

But Oklahoma shot 58 percent (34 of 59), their second-best mark all season.

Odomes went 8 of 10 in 22 minutes and left the game for good after picking up his fourth foul with 13:37 remaining. Brady Manek added 18 for the Sooners.

Tennessee 77, Colgate 70

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Admiral Schofield had 19 points and No. 2 seed Tennessee held off a second-half rally by No. 15 seed Colgate.

Jordan Bone added 16 and Jordan Bowden 14 for Tennessee (30-5), which advances to play Iowa — winner of a first-round game over Cincinnati — on Sunday.

The Raiders (24-11) erased Tennessee's 42-30 halftime lead with an 11-2 run, tied the score midway through the second half, and kept



Oklahoma's Kristian Doolittle shoots over Mississippi's KJ Buffen on Friday.

the game close after that.

Schofield hit back-to-back 3-pointers to give Tennessee a cushion with 45 seconds left, and Bone and Schofield followed with a pair of foul shots each to extend the lead as Colgate ran out of time.

UC Irvine 70, Kansas State 64

SAN JOSE, Calif. — UC Irvine got back-to-back 3-pointers from Evan Leonard to spark the deciding run in an upset over Kansas State that marked the Anteaters' first NCAA Tournament victory in school history.

The Friday victory was the 17th consecutive for UC Irvine, which lost 57-55 to Louisville in 2015 in their only NCAA appearance.

Leonard and Max Hazzard each scored 19 points to send UC Irvine (31-5) into the second round.

Iowa 79, Cincinnati 72

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Luka Garza scored 20 points, Jordan Bohannon made a three-point play during

Iowa's closing surge, and the 10th-seeded Hawkeyes kept the Big Ten perfect in the NCAA Tournament by rallying for a victory over No. 7 seed Cincinnati.

The Hawkeyes (23-11) got their first NCAA Tournament win in four years despite what amounted to a home crowd for the Bearcats, who couldn't overcome a subpar game by Jarron Cumberland.

Oregon 72, Wisconsin 54

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Payton Pritchard scored 19 points, Kenny Wooten protected the rim with four blocks and 12th-seeded Oregon extended its surprising March run by beating No. 5 seed Wisconsin.

The Ducks (24-12) won four games in four days to win the Pac-12 tournament last week just to make the NAAs then followed it with an impressive victory over a higher-seeded opponent. Oregon advanced to play No. 13 seed UC Irvine (31-5) on Sunday in the second round of the South Region.

From wire reports

EAST REGIONAL

Williamson lifts Duke to victory

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Zion Williamson had an explosive NCAA Tournament debut with 25 points and a can't-miss second-half showcase to lead top-seeded Duke to an 85-62 win over North Dakota State on Friday night.

RJ Barrett led Duke with 26 points and 14 rebounds and combined with Williamson for a prolific showing for the freshmen stars. But it was Williamson who could not be contained in the second half when he turned a tight early contest into a Duke runaway in the first round of the East Region.

Duke led just 31-27 at halftime but Williamson took over after the break. He opened the half by driving on two defenders for a layup that drew a foul. He missed the free throw but Williamson answered with a monster slam.

The highlight, though, came moments later on Williamson's breathtaking dribble-behind-his-back-after-chasing-down-his-own-steal layup.

The 6-foot-7, 285-pound freshman outran 5-foot-11 190-pound Vinnie Shahid of North Dakota State for the ball after he tipped it for a steal. Williamson then dribbled behind his back, briefly losing and regaining his balance with a hand on the floor. That cleared room for Williamson to get to the lane and go up and under for a layup.

Just like that, the Blue Devils were up 40-27 and cruising.

The Bison (19-16) never recovered.

Barrett and Williamson gave Duke two players with 20 or more points in their NCAA Tournament debut for the first time since Mark Alarie and Johnny Dawkins did it in 1984.

The Blue Devils (31-5) will face either eighth-seeded VCU or No. 9 seed UCF on Sunday for a spot in the Sweet 16.

Shahid led the Bison with 20 points.

Central Florida 73, VCU 58

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Tacko Fall had 10 points, 18 rebounds and five blocks as ninth-seeded UCF won its first NCAA Tournament game, a victory over No. 8 seed VCU.

The 7-foot-6 Fall barely left his feet to haul in some rebounds as the Rams helplessly swiped at missed shots and struggled to find open space on drives to their baskets when the Knights' towering center was nearby.

VCU tried many things to keep him from getting involved, including sending two people to face guard Fall — or come as close as possible to a player who stands more than a half-foot taller than anyone on the Rams' roster.

UCF (24-8) built a 21-point lead in the second half. The Rams (25-8) narrowed the margin to 62-55 on De'Riante Jenkins' 3-pointer with 4:53 to go, but could get no closer.

From wire reports

MIDWEST REGIONAL

North Carolina eliminates Iona

COLUMBUS, Ohio — North Carolina completed a perfect first round for top seeds in this NCAA Tournament, but not before Iona became the latest No. 16 seed to show these matchups are no sure thing.

Cameron Johnson scored 21 points, and North Carolina quickly erased a five-point halftime deficit to hot-shooting Iona, going on to win 88-73 on Friday night.

The Tar Heels (28-6), who came into the tournament as a top seed for a record 17th time, advanced to play Washington in the second round of the Midwest Region on Sunday. They're hoping to reach their 11th Final Four.

Much like Gardner-Webb did earlier Friday against No. 1 seed Virginia — which last year became the first top seed to lose in the first round — Iona surprised the Tar Heels early with their energy and outside shooting. Ricky McGill made all four of his 3-point attempts in the opening half as the Gaels (17-16) led by as many as

eight and took a 38-33 lead into halftime.

Iona's advantage disappeared quickly. Johnson's 3-pointer and Luke Maye's jumper tied it 39 seconds into the second half, and an 18-4 run put North Carolina back on track.

The bigger and stronger Tar Heels dominated the boards, outrebounding Iona 52-26 and getting 25 second-chance points.

Washington 78, Utah State 61

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Noah Dickerson had 20 points and 12 rebounds, and ninth-seeded Washington made a successful return to the tournament for the first time in eight years, beating Utah State.

The Pac-12's regular season champions swept the league's awards — top player, best defensive player and coach of the year — and got something from all of them against one of the hottest teams in March.

Houston 84, Georgia State 55

TULSA, Okla. — Corey Davis scored 26 points to help third-seeded Houston beat Georgia State.

After reaching the national final in 1984, Houston went more than three decades without winning a tournament game. Now, the Cougars have tourney wins in back-to-back seasons and are starting to resemble the program that has five Final Four appearances and produced stars including Elvin Hayes, Clyde Drexler and Hakeem Olajuwon.

Ohio State 62, Iowa State 59

TULSA, Okla. — Ohio State went from barely making the tournament to a spot in the second round with an upset of sixth-seeded Iowa State.

Kaleb Wesson had 21 points and 12 rebounds to lead the Buckeyes.

From wire reports

WEST REGIONAL

Texas Tech pounds Northern Kentucky

TULSA, Okla. — Jarrrett Culver had 29 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to help No. 3 seed Texas Tech shake off a slow start and beat No. 14 seed Northern Kentucky 72-57 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday.

Tariq Owens scored 12 points and Davide Moretti had 10 for Texas Tech (27-6), which had won nine straight games to share the Big 12 regular-season title before losing to lowly West Virginia in the Big 12 Tournament quarterfinals. That left them with an eight-day layoff.

It showed early on against Northern Kentucky (26-9), which got 23 points from Tyler Sharpe and 11 from Dantez Walton while giving the Red Raiders everything they could handle in the West

Region.

Buffalo 91, Arizona State 74

TULSA, Okla. — Looking like a No. 6 seed no one wants to play, high-scoring Buffalo breezed into the second round for the second straight year.

Jeremy Harris and Nick Perkins each had 21 points and 10 rebounds, and Buffalo was hardly bothered by 11th-seeded Arizona State.

Coach Nate Oats has pushed the Buffalo program to new heights since he took over for Bobby Hurley, who now coaches the Sun Devils and got thoroughly schooled by his former assistant. The Bulls (32-3) have won 13 straight and will face No. 3 seed Texas Tech on Sunday.

From wire reports

SCORES/SCHEDULE

FIRST ROUND

Dayton, Ohio Tuesday
Fairleigh Dickinson 82, Prairie View A&M 76
Belmont 81, Temple 72

Wednesday
North Dakota State 78, NC Central 74
Arizona State 74, St. John's 65

EAST REGIONAL

First Round Thursday Jacksonville, Fla.
LSU 79, Yale 74
Maryland 79, Belmont 77

Des Moines, Iowa Wednesday
Minnesota 86, Louisville 76
Michigan State 76, Bradley 65

Friday Columbia, S.C.
Duke 85 North Dakota State 62
Central Florida 73, VCU 58

San Jose, Calif.
Liberty 80, Mississippi State 76
Virginia Tech 66, Saint Louis 52

Second Round Today

Jacksonville, Fla.
LSU vs. Maryland

Des Moines, Iowa Sunday
Michigan State vs. Minnesota

Columbia, S.C. Sunday
Duke vs. VCU-UCF winner

San Jose, Calif. Regional Semifinals Washington
Friday, March 29
Duke-UCF winner vs. Virginia Tech-Liberty winner
Michigan State-Minnesota winner vs. LSU-Yale_Maryland-Belmont winner

Regional Championship Sunday, March 31

SOUTH REGIONAL

First Round Thursday Hartford, Conn.
Villanova 62, Saint Mary's 57
Purdue 61, Old Dominion 48

Friday Columbia, S.C.
Oklahoma 95, Mississippi 72

Virginia 71, Gardner-Webb 46

Columbus, Ohio Sunday
Iowa 79, Cincinnati 72
Tennessee 77, Colgate 70

San Jose, Calif. Sunday
UC Irvine 70, Kansas State 64
Oregon 72, Wisconsin 54

Second Round Today Hartford, Conn.
Purdue vs. Villanova

Friday Columbia, S.C.
Virginia vs. Oklahoma

Columbus, Ohio Sunday
Tennessee vs. Iowa

San Jose, Calif. Regional Semifinals Louisville, Ky. Thursday, March 28
Virginia-Oklahoma winner vs. UC Irvine-Oregon winner
Tennessee-Iowa winner vs. Purdue-Villanova winner

Regional Championship Saturday, March 30

MIDWEST REGIONAL

First Round Thursday Jacksonville, Fla.
Kentucky 79, Abilene Christian 44
Wofford 84, Seton Hall 69

Salt Lake City
Auburn 78, New Mexico State 77
Kansas 87, Northeastern 53

Friday Columbus, Ohio
Washington 78, Utah State 61
North Carolina 88, Iowa 73

Tulsa, Okla.
Houston 84, Georgia State 55
Ohio State 62, Iowa State 59

Second Round Today Jacksonville, Fla.
Kentucky vs. Wofford

Salt Lake City
Kansas vs. Auburn

Sunday Columbus, Ohio
North Carolina vs. Washington

Tulsa, Okla.
Houston vs. Ohio State

Regional Semifinals Kansas City, Mo.

Friday, March 29
North Carolina-Iona winner-Washington vs. Kansas-Auburn-winner
Kentucky-Wofford winner vs. Houston-Iowa State-Ohio State winner

Regional Championship Sunday, March 31

WEST REGIONAL

First Round Thursday Hartford, Conn.
Florida State 76, Vermont 69
Murray State 83, Marquette 64

Des Moines, Iowa
Florida 70, Nevada 61
Michigan 74, Montana 55

Salt Lake City
Gonzaga 87, Fairleigh Dickinson 49
Baylor 78, Syracuse 69

Friday Tulsa, Okla.
Texas Tech 72, Northern Kentucky 57
Buffalo 91, Arizona State 74

Second Round Today Hartford, Conn.
Florida State vs. Murray State

Des Moines, Iowa
Michigan vs. Florida

Salt Lake City
Gonzaga vs. Baylor

Sunday Tulsa, Okla.
Texas Tech vs. Buffalo

Regional Semifinals Anaheim, Calif. Thursday, March 28
Gonzaga-Baylor winner vs. Florida State-Murray State winner
Michigan-Florida winner vs. Texas Tech-Buffalo winner

Regional Championship Saturday, March 30

FINAL FOUR

Minneapolis National Semifinals Saturday, April 6
East champion vs. West champion
South champion vs. Midwest champion

National Championship Monday, April 8
Semifinal winners

NCAA WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT



Iowa forward Hannah Stewart battles Mercer center Rachel Selph for a rebound Friday in the Greensboro Regional.

Iowa fends off Mercer

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Megan Gustafson scored 30 points with 16 rebounds and second-seeded Iowa narrowly avoided a monumental upset, holding off No. 15 Mercer 66-61 on Friday for its first NCAA Tournament win in four years.

No 15 seed has ever won an NCAA Tournament game going 0-101 now.

Makenzie Meyer added 16 for the Hawkeyes (27-6), who survived the opening round at home despite committing 24 turnovers.

Hannah Stewart hit three consecutive baskets after Iowa got down by two with 4:19 to go, putting the Hawkeyes ahead 64-61. Stewart missed a jumper with 21 seconds left, but the ball knocked off a Mercer player.

Iowa's Tania Davis then missed two free throws, but the Hawkeyes were bailed out of the ensuing scrum by the possession arrow.

Kathleen Doyle finally sealed it for Iowa with two free throws with 8.9 second to go.

South Carolina 74, Belmont 52

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Te'a Cooper scored 13 points, Alexis Jennings added 12 points and nine rebounds, and South Carolina shook off a sluggish start to pull away from seed Belmont.

Tyasha Harris chipped in with 12 points and six assists and Doniyah Cliney added 10 points on 5-of-5 shooting for the Gamecocks, who won in their first game since getting upset by Arkansas in the quarterfinals of the Southeastern Conference Tournament.

The Gamecocks (22-9) advanced to Sunday's second round, where they'll face Florida State.

Florida State 70, Bucknell 67

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kiah Gillespie had 17 points and 11 rebounds, and Florida State held on to beat Bucknell.

Nicki Ekhomu, Nausia Woolfork and Valencia Myers each had 15 points for the Seminoles (24-8).

Gillespie played big in the paint, helping Florida State rebound Bucknell 44-23. She also hit a big 3-pointer in the closing minutes as the Seminoles battled back from a four-point deficit early in the fourth quarter.

Missouri 77, Drake 76

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Jordan Roundtree hit a free throw after being fouled with 1.1 seconds left in overtime and Missouri beat Drake.

Sophie Cunningham scored 21 points and Cierra Porter had 18 for the Tigers (24-10), who can advance to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2001 with a win over second-seeded and host Iowa on Sunday.

The Tigers found Amber Smith open underneath for a 76-74 lead on a jumper with 20.8 seconds left. Maddy Dean pulled Drake even at the line, but Bulldogs star Becca Hittner hit Roundtree's shooting hand while she was attempting a desperation 3. She missed the first free throw, hit the second and

missed the third.

ALBANY REGIONAL

Louisville 69, Robert Morris 34

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Asia Durr and Sam Fuehring each had 19 points, and Louisville scored 27 straight points in the first half to overwhelm Robert Morris.

The absences of suspended coach Jeff Walz and injured point guard Arica Carter didn't affect the Cardinals (30-3), who led 32-4 early in the second quarter by holding the Colonials scoreless for nearly 15 minutes. Robert Morris (22-11) missed 17 consecutive shots during that drought before making three of five entering halftime, but the game was out of reach by then.

Natalie Villaflor had 13 points and Nneka Ezeigbo nine for the Colonials, who had won their last four games.

Michigan 84, Kansas State 54

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Naz Hillmon scored 17 points off the bench, Nicole Munger and Kayla Robbins each added 13 and Michigan shot a season-high 56 percent to run away from Kansas State.

Michigan's 17-5 surge over 5:10 in the second quarter provided a 43-28 halftime lead that expanded to as many as 37 late in the fourth. The Wolverines (22-11) owned rebounding 50-19 — including a 33-13 gap defensively — and paint scoring 52-26 while holding the Wildcats (21-12) to 36 percent shooting.

Christianna Carr had 21 points and Rachel Ranke 11 for Kansas State.

Buffalo 82, Rutgers 71

STORRS, Conn. — Summer Hemphill scored 23 points and Cierra Dillard added 20 as Buffalo upset Rutgers.

Hanna Hall and Autumn Jones each added 12 points for the Bulls (24-9), who will be looking to advance to the Sweet 16 for a second straight season.

Connecticut 110, Towson 61

STORRS, Conn. — Napheesa Collier scored 23 points and UConn, in the unusual position of being a No. 2 seed, got off to its usual start with a rout of 15th-seeded Towson.

Collier added 14 rebounds in putting up her fourth straight double-double and 21st this season.

CHICAGO REGIONAL

Texas A&M 84, Wright State 61

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Kennedy Carter scored 27 points in her return from injury, with 14 coming in Texas A&M's huge first quarter, to help the No. 4 Aggies cruise to an 84-61 win over No. 13 Wright State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday.

Texas A&M, which is in the tournament for the 14th consecutive season, advances to the second round for the fourth straight year

where it will play five-seed Marquette on Sunday.

The Aggies (25-7) led by 18 early after scoring 31 points in the first quarter. The game was tied at 5-all in the first before Texas A&M used a 17-3 run to take a 22-8 lead, and it was never close again.

Marquette 58, Rice 54

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Natisha Hiedeman scored 13 points, Allazia Blockton had 12 and Marquette overcame a nine-point fourth quarter deficit to get a win over Rice.

The Golden Eagles (27-7), who are in the tournament for the third straight season, will play the winner of the Wright State-Texas A&M game.

Amani Wilborn made a jumper with 3 1/2 minutes left in overtime to put Marquette up 54-52 and extend its run to 11-0. Blockton extended the lead to 4 with a shot with just over a minute to go.

PORTLAND REGIONAL

Indiana 69, Texas 65

EUGENE, Ore. — Jaelynn Penn had 24 points and Bendu Yeaney added 17 to help 10th-seeded Indiana surprise No. 7 Texas.

Brenna Wise and Ali Patberg contributed another 10 points apiece for the Hoosiers (21-12), who were making their first appearance in the tournament since the 2015-16 season.

Clemson 79, South Dakota 66

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Simone Westbrook scored 27 points, Danielle Edwards added 25 and ninth-seeded Clemson pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat No. 8 seed South Dakota.

Edwards made four 3-pointers in the fourth quarter to turn a tight game into a fairly comfortable victory. The 5-foot-7 senior made 10 of 17 shots, including 5 of 9 from 3-point range.

Clemson (20-12) trailed for much of the game until late in the third quarter, when Westbrook made a 3-pointer to give the Tigers a 47-45 lead. The Tigers never trailed again, partly because of Edwards and partly because South Dakota's shooting touch vanished.

Arizona State 60, Central Florida 45

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Courtney Ekmark scored 15 of her game-high 20 points in the second half, and fifth-seeded Arizona State beat 12th-seeded UCF.

Ekmark opened the game with a 3-pointer, then opened the second half with a pair of 3s. Those two quickly turned what was a 10-point halftime lead to a 16-point edge, and Arizona State (21-10) wound up winning a first-round game for the sixth consecutive season.

Kay Kay Wright led UCF (26-7) with 18 points. It was the first NCAA tournament appearance for the Knights since 2011, and they're now 0-5 in their five tourney trips.

From wire reports

Bench comes up big for Flames

By Damien Sordelet
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LU NOTEBOOK

SAN JOSE, Calif. — The four players who come off Liberty's bench have dubbed themselves the "Quality Minutes Crew." The bunch delivered for the Flames on Friday night in the NCAA Tournament.

Myo Baxter-Bell delivered inside scoring, and Keenan Gumbs hit a couple of big 3-pointers early to ignite Liberty's offense in an 80-76 victory over Mississippi State at the SAP Center.

"We just come in, provide a spark of energy," Gumbs said. "The game off started a little slow, so [Liberty coach Ritchie McKay] trusted us and put us in the game, and we made plays."

The Liberty bench held a 20-18 edge in scoring to mark the 25th time in 35 games this season the group has outscored its opponent.

Baxter-Bell was at the center of that advantage. He finished with 13 points, four rebounds and four assists in 17 minutes, delivering against Mississippi State's superior size.

The Bulldogs focused on slowing down Scottie James (who finished with six points and six rebounds), and Baxter-Bell took advantage with his ability to score off the dribble and use his 6-foot-5, 255-pound frame to bully his way into scoring position near the block.

"Scottie is a really good player, and he felt like he didn't get off to a good start, but that's what teammates are for," Baxter-Bell said. "We pick each other up. ... It was a great team effort."

Gumbs finished with six points on two early 3-pointers, but his defense in the waning moments helped the Flames stave off the Bulldogs when Liberty took the lead for good with 76 seconds remaining.

Baxter-Bell hit a pair of free throws with 3.6 seconds left that capped a 6-for-6 showing for the team in the final 14.2 seconds.

"We have great foul shooters," Gumbs said. "Lovell, I always want to get him the ball at the end of the game, because he's knocking them down. Myo stepped up and hit big free throws."

We got big defensive rebounds when they started missing shots at the end."

Bulldogs' size creates problems for Flames

Liberty, despite only playing one true post player at a time, thrived in the paint throughout the season. The Flames outscored an opponent in the paint 28 times entering Friday night's contest.

Mississippi State's size and athleticism caused issues for James and the Flames' driving guards. MSU finished with whopping seven blocked shots and held a 32-22 edge in points in the paint.

"It obviously is going to affect us, their length and physicality, but you just pick your spots and know when to attack, know when to draw the help and kick it out," Baxter-Bell said. "It was just a matter of picking our spots and being smart."

The Bulldogs' guards were responsible for most of those points in the paint, as the post players did not get into a scoring groove.

Reggie Perry, Abdul Ado and Aric Holman combined for 10 points on 4-of-14 shooting.

Guarding Peters, Weatherspoon

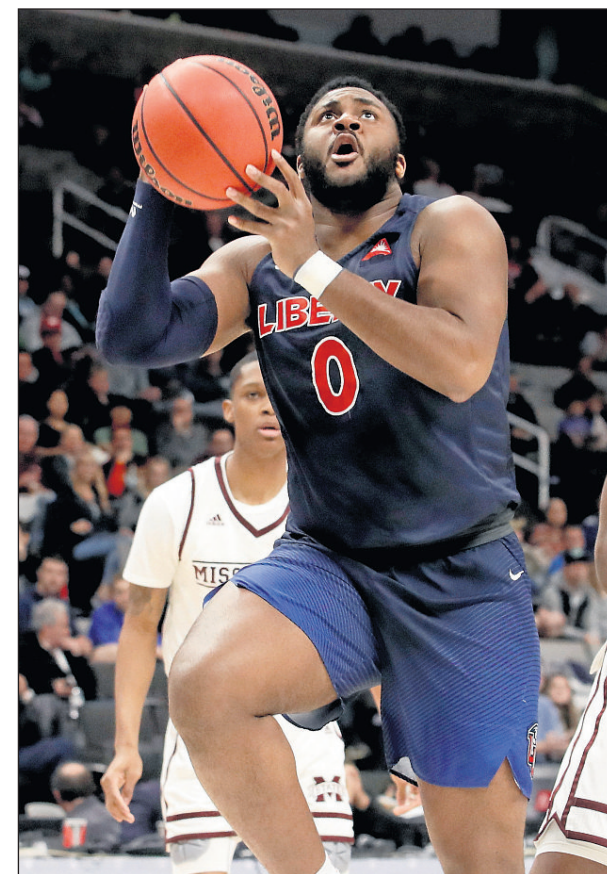
When Mississippi State needed a basket, it went to guards Quinn Dary Weatherspoon and Lamar Peters.

Weatherspoon, an all-SEC first-team selection, scored 27 points, and Peters added 21 as they found ways to score against Liberty's top two perimeter defenders, Elijah Cuffee and Cabbil.

"They're extremely tough to guard, extremely quick, they can both shoot and get to the rim, and they're green lighted," Cabbil said. "Them coming downhill and rising up for jumpers, they're pretty tough to guard."

Weatherspoon and Peters combined to shoot 14 of 26 from the field, 6 of 14 from 3-point range and 14 of 18 from the free-throw line.

The rest of the team shot 11 for 26 from the field, 2 of 8 from 3-point range and 4 of 5 from the charity stripe, highlighted by Robert Woodard's 13 points off the bench.



LU forward Myo Baxter-Bell drives to the basket against Mississippi State on Friday night.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLASS 3 STATE SOFTBALL FINAL: LIBERTY 4, TURNER ASHBY 1

TEARS OF JOY



PHOTOS BY LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Liberty pitcher Millie Thompson has an emotional reaction as she and first baseman Kinnice Turner walk off the field after leading the Minettes to their first state championship in softball.

Minettes cap a sensational season with a state championship

By Emily Brown
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SALEM — Millie Thompson faced the biggest three outs of her career. She'd been in important games before, of course, but no other play had carried so much weight.

On Friday, the left-hander took the circle for the last inning of her junior campaign with a state championship hanging in the balance.

But Thompson wasn't concerned about her ability to get the job done for her Liberty softball team.

"I just felt really confident about it," the Minettes' ace said.

She focused, instead, on staying calm. So she held back tears for each of the 13 pitches she delivered in the inning — and then couldn't keep them in any more.

Thompson crumpled to the ground and let the emotions take over, let it sink in she and the Minettes defeated Turner Ashby, 4-1, and captured the Class 3



Turner gives the state championship trophy a smooch after Friday's game.

state title.

"It is the highlight of my career so far," Thompson said. "For sure."

In the wake of a litany of early mistakes, the Minettes' resilience on the defensive end — along with timely hit-

ting and another stellar performance from Thompson — paid dividends in the form of the first state softball championship in school history.

"It's something that we've all been wanting to do for years now," Liberty senior third baseman Kacey Whorley said, "and to finally do it, it just feels so good. ... The moment you realize you made something happen you thought you never could, we're living a dream."

For the first few innings of Friday's contest at Moyer Complex, though, it looked like Liberty might have to wait at least one more year to capture the elusive state championship.

A pair of errors gave Turner Ashby a 1-0 lead in the first inning, and the Minettes couldn't get anything going at the plate for 3 1/2 frames, putting just one runner on on Whorley's single in the first.

Things began to change, however, in the fourth inning.

"We have a big-stage team. We have a



Liberty's Sydney Carter reacts after scoring a run during Friday's championship game against Turner Ashby at Moyer Complex in Salem.

SEE **JOY** | B3



PHOTOS BY LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEWS & ADVANCE
Liberty shortstop Rieley Taylor bobbles a hard-hit ball Friday.

Teammates' support the sweetest redemption for Liberty's Taylor

By Ben Cates
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SALEM — There were moments Friday morning when Rieley Taylor thought she'd cost her team the game, when she felt like she couldn't field a grounder cleanly, felt upset and angry and embarrassed.

But she never felt alone.

For the junior shortstop known throughout her career as a sure-handed defender, the Class 3 state championship game against Turner Ashby was rough. Really, really rough.

Taylor committed five errors, all within the first four



Taylor reacts after committing an error against Turner Ashby.

innings. She made two errors in the top of the first, helping Turner Ashby to a 1-0 lead. She went 0 for 3 at the plate. And she spent at

least part of the game with a tear-streaked face, hoping things would turn in her team's favor.

Then something extraordinary occurred: The Minettes bonded, embraced Taylor, told her not to worry, and then caught fire to earn a 4-1 win at the Moyer Complex.

"They pulled me out of the slump," Taylor said. "They picked me up, and every time they would make a play or get a good hit, they would look at me and say, 'That was for you.' and they would say, 'We're pulling you up, we're doing this for you.'"

They don't watch their friends fail without offering support. Instead, they lean

SEE **TAYLOR** | B3

CAROLINA LEAGUE BASEBALL

Hillcats finish on short end of pitchers' duel

From staff reports

Wilmington pitching stymied Lynchburg's offense for the second night in a row.

The Hillcats were unable to eek out another close victory this time.

Marcelo Martinez outdueled Juan Hillman and Nick Pratto homered in the eighth inning as the Blue Rocks claimed a 3-1 vic-

**WILMINGTON BLUE ROCKS 3,
LYNCHBURG HILLCATS 1**
At City Stadium

tory Friday night at City Stadium. The Hillcats (32-33) recorded their first extra-innings victory of the season Thursday night in a nail-biter against the Blue Rocks, but Wilmington (42-25) was able to use a pair of extra-base hits to

generate enough runs for the triumph.

MJ Melendez broke up the pitchers' duel with a triple to center field that scored Brewer Hicklen with no outs in the sixth for a 1-0 lead.

Pratto's sacrifice fly to left easily scored Melendez for a 2-0 advantage.

Mike Rivera doubled to lead off the bottom of the sixth and

advanced to third on Luke Wakamatsu's single.

Steven Kwan's sacrifice fly scored Rivera to trim the deficit to 2-1.

Wakamatsu stole second and advanced to third on a wild pitch, but was not able to tie the game as Martinez struck out Nolan Jones to end the frame.

Martinez (4-2) allowed the one earned run on three hits and

struck out seven over six innings.

Josh Mitchell and Tad Ratliff combined to allow only one hit over the final three innings, and Ratliff pitched a perfect ninth for his 14th save.

Pratto homered off Dakody Clemmer in the eighth for the final run.

Hillman (3-6) allowed two earned runs on eight hits and struck out six in 5 2/3 innings.



LEE LUTHER JR./FOR THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Liberty shortstop Riele Taylor slaps the tag on Turner Ashby's Makayla Cyzick during Friday's state championship game.

Taylor

From Page B1

on one another.

So there was Kacey Whorley, Taylor's best friend, going 3 for 3, all singles rifled up the middle, who delivered the go-ahead hit in the fifth.

There was Taylor Friess, who played sick after two hospital visits and five IV treatments, making an inning-ending diving catch in the fifth and then saving two runs by stretching out for an over-the-shoulder grab on a ball to deep center one inning later.

There was Kinnice Turner, who continued obliterating Turner Ashby pitching by going 2 for 3 with an RBI double in the sixth after bruising the Knights with game-defining hits in the 2018 and 2019 Region 3C championship games.

And there was Millie Thompson, the fiery southpaw pitcher who had her changeup working particularly well in Friday's dominant two-hit performance.

They all came together for Riele Taylor.

"We just needed to have each other's back," said Friess, who underwent an IV treatment Thursday night for an abscessed tonsil and added, "I wanted to get this win for

my team. That's all I really wanted to do."

Taylor said she struggled with the mental part of softball for a long time. In the last few years she's made great strides in that department.

But on a day when she committed more errors in four innings than she had in her entire varsity career, the old problems flared up again.

"People were here to see me that have never been to see me before, and I was disappointed in my performance," she said. "But my team stepped up."

Whorley didn't doubt her friend at shortstop.

"She had her shaky moments in the game, but I know Riele better than anyone," Whorley said. "When stuff like that happens, she just bounces back."

Liberty coach Mike Thompson said the field at Moyer was dry and tough Friday, one day after it played soft because of rain prior to the semifinal round.

"I told her multiple times there's still nobody else in the state I'd rather have at shortstop than her," the coach said.

The championship was Liberty's first in softball and fourth overall in school history. It taught Thompson's players something about teamwork. The coach hopes it will have the same effect on Bedford County.

"I hope it's the first step as far as support goes," he said. "It's a great community, but at the same time it can be a tough community, and we have to support each other."

On the last day of the season, after a championship game she'll never forget, Taylor let the tears flow one more time. She talked about friendships and about how, in just 1 hour and 30 minutes, she had learned valuable lessons.

"I was a little more independent this year," Taylor said. "I didn't rely on my teammates as much as I should have. But at the time when I needed them most, I knew that was what I had to do. There were people trying to talk to me from the stands. But I was like, 'I need my team right now.'"

Sometimes teammates are the only ones who can help, and sometimes, on the long journeys like Liberty's, those teammates become a family.

"Every one of them did an incredible job being there for me at the lowest point of my season," she said. "And it was just incredible to see everyone come together. They didn't turn on me, they didn't get down on me for anything. They didn't belittle me or denigrate me. They pulled me up. They're family, and I love them for that."

Ben Cates covers high school sports for The News & Advance. Reach him at (434) 385-5527.

Joy

From Page B1

bunch of girls that, instead of choking under pressure, we absorb it," Whorley said. "... The girls that we have are used to being in this situation, having to make something happen."

Whorley broke through for her second hit of the day to lead off the frame, sending the ball through the middle once again. Although Whorley was erased as Gracie Dooley grounded into a fielder's choice, the Minettes still cashed in.

Dooley evened the score at 1-1 when Paige Naples put the ball in play with two outs. Naples adjusted against Turner Ashby pitcher Makayla Cyzick to jumpstart the Minettes' offense, taking the advice of her coach, Mike Thompson, to be aggressive on the first pitch.

"She wanted to go inner-half on that first pitch, get that first strike across and then back us up a little bit and working us away and working us rise ball," Thompson said of Cyzick. "I just told them we're gonna have to push the pace of play a little bit, go after those first pitches, look for something inner-half, and if it's there, drive it, and if it's not, let it go."

Naples sent the ball to left to give Dooley a chance to cross home, but left fielder Kaylin Howard sent a rocket to catcher Carley Davis at the plate to prevent a second run

and help Turner Ashby escape the inning.

The run was the first of four unanswered for the Minettes.

Liberty tacked on two runs in the fifth, as Whorley (3 for 3) provided the go-ahead run on her single through the middle and as Turner Ashby committed an error.

Whorley had half of Liberty's hits, reversing her 0-for-3 in the semifinals after spending Thursday night in the batting cage back in Bedford.

Kinnice Turner, who went 2 for 3, brought the score to 4-1 on an RBI double in the sixth.

"I've just been so confident in the past when I've played against them," said Turner, who had a walkoff single against TA last season in the Region 3C championship and a three-run double against the Knights in this year's region title game, "so I just kept that same composure, and I just stayed in for them, did it for [my teammates]."

Thompson, meanwhile, shut down Turner Ashby from the circle. The southpaw, who didn't give up an earned run, stranded a Knights runner in the third and fourth innings after Liberty committed an error in each frame and didn't allow a hit until the sixth inning.

"She just took the things that she did well last game and did the same thing today so we couldn't hit her," Cyzick said of Thompson. "She knew where to pitch us. She's a really good pitcher."

Both of the hits Thompson gave

up came in the sixth inning, the first a leadoff single by Davis and the second a single from Cyzick that came screaming back to the circle and hit Thompson on the ankle.

Thompson, who had four strikeouts, retired the next three batters to end the threat.

"It hurt like hell," Thompson said of the bruising liner, "but I'm not coming out in this situation. Broken leg or not, this is what I wanted to do. You've just gotta hunker down and do your job, and we did."

The victory Friday capped an undefeated postseason run for the Minettes, and to come away with a state championship, after suffering three straight losses to end the regular season (six close defeats overall), made the win that much sweeter.

"We had a lot of losses early in the season that we shouldn't have had," Whorley said. "But we came back from those late in the season, and look at us now."

Emily Brown covers the Hillcats, ODAC and high school sports for The News & Advance. Reach her at (434) 385-5529.

CLASS 3 CHAMPIONSHIP						
LIBERTY 4, TURNER ASHBY 1						
Ashby	100	000	0-	1	2	3
Liberty	000	121	x-	4	6	5
WP:	Millie Thompson.	LP:	Makayla Cyzick.			
Highlights:	TA — Carley Davis 1-3; Gracie Moyers 0-3, R; Cyzick 1-3, 6 IP, 6 H, 4 R, 2 ER, 0 BB, 9 Ks. LHS — Kacey Whorley 3-3, RBI; Gracie Dooley 1-3, 2B, 2 R; Paige Naples 0-3, RBI; Kinnice Turner 2-3, 2B, RBI; Thompson 7 IP, 2 H, 1 R, 0 ER, 0 BB, 4 Ks.					
Records:	Turner Ashby 23-5. Liberty 21-6.					

GOLF: U.S. OPEN

Tiger struggles to recapture Masters magic

By Tim Dahlberg
The Associated Press

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. —

The crowd lining the ninth hole some 100 yards short of the seaside green at Pebble Beach couldn't have been more pumped as Tiger Woods blasted out of a fairway bunker and his ball came to rest in the rough just in front of them.

No matter that Woods would have a difficult — and ultimately unsuccessful — task of trying to save par on his last hole of the day. This was their chance to see greatness up close, with the only downside being they weren't supposed to use their cellphones to record the moment at hand.

That might not have been such a bad thing. Because there wasn't much memorable about the shot or a second round Friday in the U.S. Open that left Woods fuming about missed opportunities.

"I'm a little hot right now," Woods said after emerging from the scoring trailer off the ninth green. "I just signed my card about a minute ago. So need a little time to cool down a little bit."

Woods would bogey the hole after missing yet another putt, the second of two straight bogeys to finish a round of 1-over 72 that left him well off the lead. That's enough to make any player upset, especially Woods because the expectations — his and others — are always going to be higher.

He thrilled everyone in golf by winning the Masters two months ago to break an 11-year drought in the majors. The chatter among casual fans was that Woods was back to his dominating ways, and one bettor in Las Vegas even wagered \$100,000 that he would win all four majors this year.

But this isn't 19 years ago, when Woods romped to a historic 15-shot win in the Open here, then won the next three majors to hold all four at the same time.

This isn't even April, when he somehow managed to separate himself from a crowd of players on the back nine and win his fifth green jacket in a memorable moment at Augusta National.

A second day of inconsistent play in the U.S. Open made one thing clear for all except the most rabid fan boys — and girls.

Woods isn't going to win every major, not even close. Fact is, the odds are he won't win another for some time — if ever.

That's not a knock on Woods, who is certainly the greatest player of his generation and in the conversation when it comes to the greatest of all time. In his prime he won tournaments by bunches, overpowering courses and intimidating everyone playing against him.

But he's 43 now, and no longer blasts it by everyone. The putts that used to go in automatically don't anymore, something that was more than evident Friday when hit 13 greens and made only one birdie.

Meanwhile, new power players keep emerging to challenge him like they were manufactured in a factory somewhere.

"How do you compete against kids that were born — for me, born in the 2000s?" Woods asked earlier in the week. "They were born after I won this damn tournament."

Actually, there is only one player in the field born after Woods won here in 2000. That would be Michael Thorbjornsen, a 17-year-old amateur who was two shots behind Woods after two rounds.

Still, the huge throngs who crowded into Pebble Beach came early Friday to see a legend in person. They expected to see at least flashes of the greatness that defines his career and was on display at the Masters.

What they got instead was a player fast approaching middle age and mindful of how many majors he might have left. Woods talked about it earlier in the week, saying he figured he's got 10 years of competitive golf left, with 40 or so chances to add to his collection of 15 major titles and perhaps surpass the record of 18 owned by Jack Nicklaus.

"That's a lot of majors," Woods said.

But he also talked about having to conserve energy by not playing practice rounds before tournaments, something he wouldn't have even thought of in his prime. and he's always talking about the aches and pains that come with age that are compounded by swinging a golf club, and his former back troubles always lurk in the back-ground.

Simply put, he's got a lot more to worry about these days than he did in his prime.

Woods showed with his win at Augusta National that he can still play golf at a very high level. But he didn't even make the weekend of the PGA Championship last month and his play at Pebble has been spotty at best.

CLASS 2 STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: APPOMATTOX 42, STUARTS DRAFT 21

APPOMATTOX, AGAIN

Raiders claim their fourth state title in five years



PHOTOS BY TAYLOR IRBY/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Appomattox running back Cristian Ferguson reacts after scoring a touchdown against Stuarts Draft in Saturday's state championship game at Salem Football Stadium in Salem.

Ferguson, Lawing spark the attack

By Emily Brown
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SALEM — This team doesn't give up, the Appomattox coach said as some of the celebration at Salem Football Stadium died down. After Doug Smith's Raiders went three-and-out on the opening possession of the second half, then gave up a game-tying score, they didn't give up.

After Stuarts Draft perfectly executed a couple trick plays to set up another score, which cut their lead to one touchdown, the Raiders didn't give up.

And when they started the season with two losses in their first three games, Appomattox didn't give up.

So on Saturday, as they responded to every one of Stuart Draft's attacks on the biggest stage of the 2019 season, the hard work paid off in the



Appomattox quarterback Tre Lawing eludes a Stuarts Draft defender Saturday.

reward every team longs for: a state championship.

For the fourth time in five years, Appomattox hoisted the championship trophy by defeating Stuarts Draft 42-21.

In their past 12 games, the Raiders put together 12 wins. Saturday's victory in the Class 2 state champion-

ship, of course, was the sweetest.

"Oh, it feels 100 times better," Tyler Gilliam said when asked about whether the postgame feeling lived up to his expectations. "This moment is a moment I'll never forget." Gilliam's first taste of the

SEE **ATTACK** | C5

Appomattox thrives with a powerful combination

By Ben Cates
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SALEM — In between celebrations Saturday night, coach Doug Smith huddled with his team one final time. They wore smiles. They looked at one another and laughed. And they listened closely.

This is what they heard: Don't stop believing in yourselves. Don't stop being an example to others. Always keep the faith.

"Faith and hard work," Smith said as he looked his players in the eye, "that's a powerful combination."

It certainly is. The Class 2 state championship game, in which Appomattox defeated Stuarts Draft 42-21, was an exercise in whether players would remember

lessons Smith has tried to instill in them all year, the ones that go beyond gridiron assignments or proper techniques or executing plays to perfection.

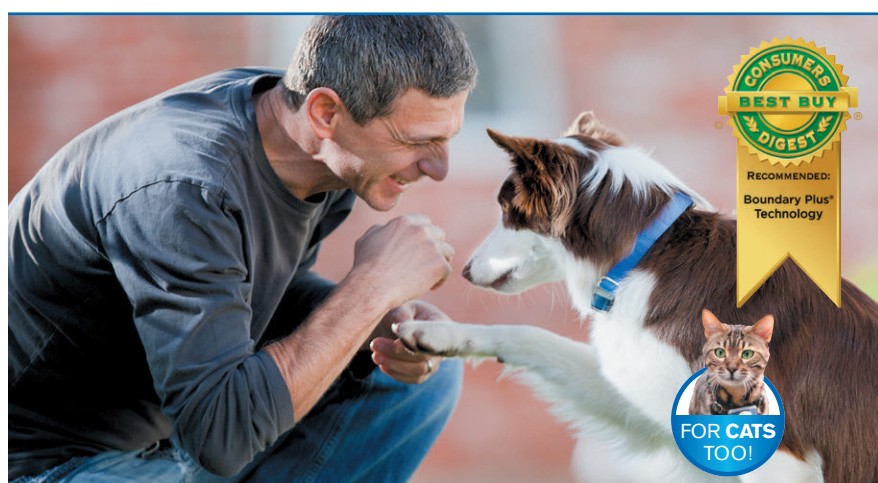
These lessons are about character. They go to the heart of becoming not just a champion, but a better human being.

And the lessons — perseverance, love for others, faith and hard work — stuck with Appomattox players.

So Tre Lawing knelt on the turf at Salem Football Stadium after the clock expired and didn't get up until several of his teammates pulled him to his feet.

And Cristian Ferguson

SEE **THRIVES** | C6



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APPOMATTOX NOTEBOOK

Gilliam all over the field for the Raiders

By Ben Cates and Emily Brown
The News & Advance

Playing in his first state championship game, wrapping up his first-ever season of varsity football, the senior couldn't be stopped.

Stuarts Draft has just tied the score at 14 when Tyler Gilliam took the ensuing kickoff 62 yards, weaving around defenders, cutting up the turf and getting blocks along the way.

He was finally brought down, but not until he was deep in Cougars territory, on the 17-yard line. Appomattox scored three plays later for a 21-14 lead, a score that jumpstarted a 28-7 second-half run.

"We needed a spark, and my teammates set up the blocking perfectly," Gilliam said. "I just had to find a hole and run as hard as I could."

The senior filled the stat sheet. He had a 44-yard punt return and two kick returns for a total of 77 yards, and also punted for the Raiders, totaling 137 yards on three punts (45.7 average).

Gilliam also caught a 7-yard touchdown pass from Tre Lawing with one minute left in the third quarter to give ACHS a 28-14 lead.

"It's an amazing feeling finally getting my own ring," he said. "But for this community, it's definitely big. Starting [the season] off slow and coming together and having the community behind our backs the whole way, it's a good feeling to give back to them."

Despite injuries, Baker still fought

For several weeks, Keyshawn Baker, a junior running back and linebacker, has been fighting injuries.

The Appomattox staff still isn't sure what kind of knee injury he has. That's because he hasn't



Appomattox's Tyler Gilliam celebrates the Raiders' Class 2 state championship Saturday in Salem.

slowed up enough to get it taken care of. Now that the season is over — and he's picked up his second career state championship — getting to a doctor is in on the docket for the near future, he promised.

"He doesn't stop," coach Doug Smith said of Baker. "He just wants to keep on giving for his team."

Saturday, he fought through more pain.

The existing injuries contributed, but so did an injury on the game's opening kickoff.

He had to be helped off the turf by athletic trainers.

No matter. The junior returned, of course, to fight some more,

and was in on tackles and had a pair of carries.

"I had a little pain throughout the entire game, but I just prayed to God that I could still play and fight with my brothers," Baker said, "and he allowed me to."

Foreign exchange student contributes with foot

Samuele Bianco, a junior, came to the U.S. this year as a foreign exchange student to Appomattox County High School.

In his first year with the Raiders, he's walking away a state champ.

Bianco, the Raiders' place kicker, came from Italy and picked up football after having played

soccer for 11 years. His job then was to kick the ball, he said, and is the same now.

Bianco has been the Raiders' consistent placekicker all season, and in the win Saturday, he converted all four of his extra-point attempts.

"I am so glad," Bianco said. "That's my family."

Defending the run

Stuarts Draft put up 253 rushing yards, using lengthy drives to try to wear down the Appomattox defense. Sometimes, the plan worked. But Appomattox also dropped ball carriers in the backfield or at the line of scrimmage seven times.

Tez Booker led the way with eight tackles, JaQuan Walker added five, Jordan Scott finished with 4½ and Cristian Ferguson four.

The final dagger

With 4:05 remaining and Appomattox up 35-21, Booker intercepted a pass from Draft quarterback Henry Cooke that sealed the deal. Appomattox went on to score again on its ensuing drive.

"As soon as the quarterback released the ball I broke on it and tried to get as many yards as I could," Booker said. "I knew my offense would get on the field and score once again."

From the stat sheet

Stuarts Draft had remarkable success in certain areas, while it struggled in others. For instance, the Cougars converted 6 of 8 fourth-down chances and all three scoring chances in the red zone.

But its defense also allowed Ferguson and quarterback Tre Lawing to tear up the turf. Lawing averaged nearly 9 yards per carry, while Ferguson averaged 11 yards per tote.

Quick strikes

Appomattox's run to state titles in 2015, '16 and '17 were defined by quick strikes: defensive touchdowns and short drives that changed the outcome of the game in a hurry.

That's what the Raiders did Saturday, too. The second half was one in which the lead ballooned and a young Raiders team looked like teams of old. The most telling moment: a one-play drive after the Cougars, pinned to the end zone, chose to punt. The ball went straight up in the air, Appomattox took over, and Lawing hit Gilliam with a touchdown to make it 28-14.

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LSU's Burrow wins Heisman Trophy

By **Ralph D. Russo**
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Born into a family of Cornhuskers and raised in the Buckeye state, Joe Burrow left his roots behind and became a Heisman Trophy winner at LSU.

The quarterback won the Heisman on Saturday night in a record landslide vote, becoming the first LSU player to bring college football's most prestigious award back to Baton Rouge in 60 years.

Burrow received 2,608 points and 841 first-place

votes, a record 90.7% of all the first-place votes available.

Burrow also set a record for percentage of points available received with 93.8, breaking the mark set by Troy Smith of Ohio State in 2006.

Burrow was named on 95.5% of all ballots, breaking the record of 95.2% set by Oregon's Marcus Mariota in 2014.

Burrow's margin of victory of 1,846 broke the record of 1,750 set by O.J. Simpson of Southern California in 1968.

Oklahoma quarterback

Jalen Hurts was second with 762 points.

Quarterback Justin Fields of Ohio State was third and Buckeyes teammate and defensive end Chase Young was fourth.

Burrow transferred last year to LSU from Ohio State, where he was a sparingly used reserve. After finishing strong for the Tigers in 2018, he broke out this season, setting a Southeastern Conference record with 48 touchdown passes and leading top-ranked LSU to its first College Football Playoff appearance.

VES runner an All-American

From staff reports

In San Diego, California, Virginia Episcopal School senior Daniel O'Brien earned All-American status for the second straight year with a career showing at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships held Saturday at Balboa Park's Morley Field.

O'Brien concluded his high school cross country career with a seventh-place finish, which easily topped his 12th-place showing as a junior.

"It definitely feels great," he said in a phone interview after the race.

O'Brien finished with a time of 15:24.1 to claim second-team All-America honors. The time was 21 seconds faster than his performance last year when he earned third-team honors.



O'Brien

"I'm really happy," he said.

O'Brien said he attacked the 5,000-meter course the same as he did last year with a conversative start and not to "go out super hard" over the first 2,000 meters.

The difference this year was his ability to keep the front pack in sight, which allowed him to attack in the race's second half.

"It was faster this year," he noted.

Josh Methner, a senior at John Hersey High School in Mount Prospect, Illinois, won in a time of 15:08.8. He finished eight seconds ahead of second-place Carter Solomon, a senior from Plymouth High School in Canton, Michigan.



TAYLOR IRBY/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Appomattox's Cristian Ferguson breaks free during Saturday's state championship game in Salem.

Attack

From Page C1

Appomattox football wasn't so sweet, though. The Raiders dropped their season opener in August. Back then, reaching Salem again seemed, perhaps, like a dream relegated only to the realm of imagination instead of reality.

But thanks to their determination to work as one unit, with offense, defense and special teams all clicking, the Raiders (13-2) pulled off what looked so improbable about four months ago.

"Nobody really believed that we could do it," Gilliam said, "and being able to actually capitalize and do it, it's just crazy."

As it defeated a Stuarts Draft team that entered with just one loss on the season, ACHS, indeed, put all aspects of the game together.

Offensively, multiple people contributed for six total touchdowns. Special teams play, including a big 62-yard kickoff return by Gilliam in the third quarter, set up a score. Defensively, when the Cougars (13-2) reached into their bag of tricks to set up a touchdown that cut the Appomattox lead to 28-21, the Raiders clamped down.

First, it was Cristian Ferguson, the senior running back who collected his third career championship Saturday, who delivered. He opened the scoring with a 46-yard run that gave Appomattox plenty of momentum early in the game.

"Good blocking by the line, and just green grass," Ferguson said of his touchdown run.

The burly back added a 14-yard run that capped the scoring with 2:37 left in the game.

Tre Lawing, the team's sophomore quarterback, stepped up, too. In his first chance to lead the Raiders to a state title, he did the job, accounting for four touchdowns.

Lawing ran it in from 2 yards first to give his team a 14-7 lead in the second quarter, then punched it in from the 5-yard line in the third quarter after Gilliam's long kickoff return.

Later, Lawing did everything himself on a one-play drive, ripping off an 80-yard run down the right

sideline. He also found Gilliam for a 7-yard touchdown pass on another one-play drive.

Although Lawing's 80-yard run effectively sealed the win for the Raiders, the defense stepped up, too.

Freddie Watkins took a 7-yard pass from Henry Cooke for a Stuarts Draft score in the fourth quarter — made possible after the Cougars converted on a fake punt and then executed what looked like a reverse for a 42-yard pass — that cut the Appomattox lead to seven points. Then, the Raiders locked down on the defensive side, forcing a three-and-out, coming up with an interception by Tez Booker and forcing a turnover on downs for the remainder of the fourth quarter.

"Everybody had to play their part. They couldn't play anybody else's part," said junior Keyshawn Baker, who went down on the game's opening kickoff with an injury, but then returned to help out especially on the defensive side of the ball. "They played their part, and we completed the puzzle."

For Stuarts Draft, Cooke accounted for a pair of touchdowns — one rushing and one passing — and had 120 yards on 11-of-32 passing. Aaron Nice (1-yard run) and Watkins (7-yard reception) each added a score.

"They're a good team. They made good plays, and we just didn't play our best tonight," Watkins, a senior, said. "We just didn't block the way we wanted to, catch the way we wanted to, play defense the way we wanted to, and the scoreboard showed it."

Ferguson had 117 yards on 11 rushes, and Lawing finished with 121 yards on 16 carries to go with 9 yards on 2-of-5 passing in his first time playing on the Salem Stadium turf for a state championship.

The young quarterback let the feeling of accomplishment wash over him as teammates and coaches rejoiced around him. He had a hard time encompassing everything it took for his team to get there. But the victory, he'd be fine to experience that again.

"I could play another one," Lawing said. "That's how happy I am."

Contact Emily Brown at (434) 385-5529.

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AREA COLLEGE BASKETBALL

LU remains unbeaten with win at Vanderbilt

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Myo Baxter-Bell scored 18 points and Liberty kept its unbeaten season alive with a 61-56 upset at Vanderbilt on Saturday.

The Flames (12-0) were one of five undefeated teams coming into the game. Vanderbilt fell to 6-3.

Caleb Homesley scored 14 and Elijah Cuffee added 13 for Liberty.

Aaron Nesmith threw in a game-high 19 points for Vanderbilt. Saben Lee scored 16. Nesmith (22.8) and Lee (17.4) entered the game as the

second-highest-scoring duo in the nation.

The second half was a back-and-forth affair with the teams swapping the lead seven times. Liberty took the lead for good at 51-50 with 3:07 left on a layup by Cuffee.

Vanderbilt went cold from the field down the stretch and did not hit a field goal for 6:15 until Lee made a layup with 7 seconds left and hit a 3 at the buzzer to end the game.

Vanderbilt finished the first half on an 11-0 run. Over the last 2:56, the Commodores got

3-pointers from Dylan Disu, Lee and Nesmith. Nesmith's 3 broke a 27-all tie with 15 seconds left, then Scotty Pippen Jr. threw a perfect alley-oop pass from beyond the arc to Lee at the buzzer to give Vanderbilt a 32-27 lead at the break.

It was the first time the Flames have trailed at the half this year.

St. Mary's College 89, Randolph 55

In St. Mary's City, Maryland, Gary Grant scored 18 points to lead five players in double figures and the Seahawks (3-5) shot 50% in the second half to

pull away for a comfortable victory over the WildCats (4-6) at O'Brien ARC Arena.

Evan Makle had 15 points and Brian Smith 14 points for RC.

WOMEN

Liberty 83, Hampton 59

In Hampton, Keyen Green scored 17 points on 7-of-9 shooting to lead three players in double figures, Liberty shot 68.9% in the second half, and the Flames routed Hampton.

The Flames (4-6) have won three of their past four games.

Bridgette Rettstatt scored 16 points and added five rebounds and four assists.

Emily Lytle, making her first start since Nov. 24 at James Madison, posted her second double-double in three games with 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Liberty outscored Hampton 49-31 in the second half, and the Pirates shot 13 of 34 from the field over the final 20 minutes.

Lauren Vanarsdale led the Pirates (2-4) with 15 points, four rebounds, seven assists and three steals.

From staff and wire reports

Thrives

From Page C1

felt as if he were living in a dream.

And Tyler Gilliam couldn't stop smiling as he talked about having joy through the struggle that was the 2019 season.

Yes, the lessons stuck.

"We had a lot of struggles early on this year," Gilliam said. "But having joy and coming together as one, it's definitely gonna have an impact on me for the rest of my life."

Some championships, like the ones Appomattox celebrated in 2016 and 2017, came a little easier. This one was tough.

This group wasn't projected to win even the Dogwood District, much less a state title. This group lost two of its first three games and looked like an empty shell compared to recent teams that had come before it.

But the group few people believed in accomplished big things Saturday by claiming its fourth state championship in a five-season span.

"It's a wonderful experience to come all the way from people doubting us to now we just won states," junior receiver and



TAYLOR IRBY/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

The Appomattox Raiders hug after winning the state championship Saturday against Stuarts Draft.

defensive back Tez Booker said. "Because there were people who didn't even think we were gonna make the playoffs."

Sometimes it seems like no one believes in you. That's when it's so important to believe in yourself.

"We just stayed true to ourselves," said Ferguson, who rumbled for 117 rushing yards and two touchdowns Saturday night. "We didn't give up on

ourselves. We never stopped believing."

That's a hallmark trait of this program. That's why fans chanted "PO1" as the clock wound down in Salem, channeling the first great season in 2015 when Appomattox's motto was "Power of One." That term still means a great deal in Raider Country.

And this year's "Joy through the struggle" motto was emblematic of the offseason trials

and early-season tribulations.

"Everybody on this team has been through something," Lawing said.

The sophomore quarterback accounted for four touchdowns Saturday, including a 5-yard run that broke a 14-14 tie and an 80-yard run that gave the Raiders a sudden 35-21 lead just five minutes later.

After the game, he took a moment to reflect on the turf.

"I was just thanking the Lord for giving me the potential," he said.

In the post-game huddle, Smith told his group that, trophy or no trophy, the journey was worth it.

"I'd give away every ring, every single one of 'em, for this experience with you guys tonight," he said.

He wanted to leave his players with something they'd remember forever.

"Faith in their creator, something bigger than themselves, and then learning what he wants us to do: love other people, serve other people, which is exactly what they're doing out here," he said.

"That line is blocking for their backs, every special team is trying to do something for either the offense or the defense."

That's why Smith told his team all year to keep believing and working.

Turns out, faith and hard work was what Appomattox needed most.

"If they carry that on in life with their families, their coworkers and the people around them, their friends," Smith said, "then I just think they're gonna be some terrific people."

Contact Ben Cates at (434) 385-5527.

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