

Abingdon runners Makaleigh Jessee and Rives Boltwood led the Falcons to win at Randy Smith Classic. **B2**



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B
SECTION

50 years ago, Randy Smith laid out a course of history

Have you ever push-mowed 6 miles? Randy Smith has, and he loved every minute of it.



Johnny Wilson

Well, he really didn't have to mow the entire 6 miles, but he would have if needed. Some of the terrain was back in the woods, so he wouldn't have had to mow in there.

Regardless, Smith was all about getting it done back in the fall of 1973 — whatever the chore.

In this case, he was designing a 5,000-meter course to run at Sugar Hollow Park, which is in its 50th season of hosting cross-country events for high school runners far and wide.

Last week, 38 schools and 757 runners competed in the 16th annual Randy Smith Classic at Sugar Hollow.

"I used to mow the course in those early days with a push mower," Smith said. "I wanted the path to be at least 48 inches wide, so I had to mow it twice (up and then back) to get that width." Smith wanted his brainstorm to turn out as well as possible.

"It was kind of my baby in a way," said Smith, now 71.

Smith was there during the infancy of local cross-country, starting the program at John Battle in August 1973, his first year out of Appalachian State. He remembers it as if it were last week.

"When I came to John Battle, we did not have a cross-country team, nor did many of the schools in the area," said Smith, a Winston-Salem native who ran cross-country in high school before playing soccer in college. "Marion, I think, had one under Buddy Brockman and maybe Tennessee High or D-B or a couple others. A number of schools started up that fall or in '74.

"Phil Robbins wanted us to start one because he was the head track coach at Battle, and obviously if you can have a strong cross-country program, at least some of that would carry over to the spring for events like the 800 and longer distances."

And the rookie cross-country coach with shoulder-length hair — who has said, "They all probably thought I wandered in from Woodstock" — desired a home course.

"I wanted to be able to run some home meets," Smith said. "So I got right to work on it."

The layout served well enough for a couple years, until Ron Helmer campaigned for a change.

"The original course went more back into the park, almost to the creek, if you know where that is back there," Smith said. "We sort of wound through the woods and came back across the dam, so it was a little bit different.

"When Ron came to Virginia High (in) 1975 or '76, his concern was with the loop that went back through the woods and all of that. You might lose control of things a little bit (with the runners out of sight), and you've got tree roots and things like that back there."

Smith had mixed feelings. "Coaches kind of differ on this, but I was always of the mindset that if it's cross-country, then it ought to be cross-country," he said. "I mean, over in Europe, they jump over hay bales and run through creeks and everything else on a cross-country run. So that was more my idea, to not turn it into 'spring track on grass' or something like that.

"But I knew Ron had a good point, too, and he'd been a runner himself at a small school (Southwestern College) in Kansas known for its distance runners. And, of course, he's proven to be an excellent coach for a long, long

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Past and present intersect at Randy Smith Classic

By **TANNER COOK**
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Oh, the stories the pine trees at Sugar Hollow Park cross-country course in Bristol could tell if they could talk.

They'd speak of the early days when legendary John S. Battle coach Randy Smith was laying out the course back in the early 1970s.

They'd rave about the torrid pace that the likes of Virginia High's Frankie Nunn and Maria Large set on their way to course records at the 1980 Region IV meet under the direction of the legendary Bearcats coach Ron Helmer.

They'd quibble for hours on end if Marion's Greg Hoofnagle really tied Nunn's record just two years later.

Then they'd praise Marion's Fleet Hower for when he finally surpassed the old record and established a new standard on the historic 3-mile course in 2001.

But last Thursday's Randy Smith Classic would be one that those trees would jabber about until the end of days. The meet is most certainly the largest ever staged at the park and is believed to be the largest ever in Southwest Virginia as over 40 high schools from five different states and over 1,000 runners toed the line.

For someone like Smith, who has seen the course change and evolve over 50 years, the meet was a culmination of the many days of hard work.

"We've run some regionals here, and we used to host something called the Southwest Virginia Jamboree, but neither of those were ever this big," Smith said. "There's a lot of my former runners here, and that really is humbling. I never thought of myself as some great cross-country coach. I was just a guy who enjoyed it, and I loved being around the kids."

The course — which is one of Virginia's oldest continually used treks — celebrated its golden anniversary in style with clear blue skies and a crowd that will probably never be topped.

"The course has changed three or four times," Smith said. "But it has been essentially the same for 50 years. It's very humbling and gratifying to see something last this long."

In the crowd were numerous former runners, including some who had not been back to the hallowed grounds in nearly four decades.

Todd Tipton — a former Battle record-holder that lives out west — made the journey back east to honor his former coach and pay homage to the course on its greatest day.

"This is the first time I've been back to this course in 40 years," Tipton said. "(John Battle co-coach) Dwayne Ball called me and said it was the 50th anniversary of the course and that he'd like for me to come in.

"I wanted to come in and see it. I appreciate cross-country because it's something you can carry with you for the rest of



TANNER COOK/BRISTOL NOW

Former John S. Battle coach Randy Smith is credited with founding the course at Sugar Hollow Park in 1973. Smith coached at Battle for over 25 years, bringing up numerous all-state runners in his time. On Thursday, he was honored with a plaque and a picture of the first Battle team in 1973.



TANNER COOK/BRISTOL NOW

Three of the course's all-time best runners were honored at Thursday's event as (from left) former Marion runner Greg Hoofnagle, former Virginia High runner Frankie Nunn and former Marion runner Fleet Hower were given plaques. Nunn and Hoofnagle are tied for the old course record (14:40), and Hower holds the current course record (14:26).

your life. I'm 57, and I ran this morning, and I'll be racing next month."

What made Thursday special for area running nerds was the intersection of history as Nunn, Hoofnagle and Hower were in the same place at the same time.

"It's a real throwback being back here again and not having to compete," Hower said.

"There's a lot of great memories, and it's great to have a really big crowd."

One of the best sights was the top three — in terms of all-time bests on the course —

talking about the old days with former Marion coach Gene Walker and how running has changed.

"It's a lot of fun to come back because I haven't been back here in almost 40 years,"

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TANNER COOK/BRISTOL NOW

The varsity boys start the race at Thursday's Randy Smith Classic at Sugar Hollow Park. Abingdon's Rives Boltwood won the race by covering the 3-mile course in 16:03.9.

SMITH

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time — good grief, he coached at Georgetown (for 20 years), and this year he's retiring (after 15 years as head man) from Indiana University."

Smith credits Helmer as the chief figure who put Southwest Virginia on the state's cross-country map, his boys and girls combining to earn four Group AA championships and four runner-up finishes from 1977-82, as well as winning five individual titles.

"Ron Helmer and the standard he set influenced the quality of cross-country in this area more than anyone," said Smith, who produced four state

runner-up teams and two individual champs himself during the 1980s. "If you didn't want to get 15'ed (where Helmer's runners took the first five places, totaling a minimal 15 points), then bring your A game, or you'd be embarrassed."

So the course was changed after a couple seasons to basically what it is today. But there was a slight miscalculation (161 meters) with the make-over.

"Ron asked if he could lay out a course, so he did," Smith recalled. "But then, when we measured after he laid it out, it came up 3 miles (instead of the standard 3.1). But people liked the new layout so much that we just decided to keep it like it was at 3 miles.

"It's been modified over the years as they've added parking lots, but we've always double- and triple-checked the distance to keep it 3 miles. Because I think it's important that kids today can make a comparative analysis with what kids ran 10, 20, 30 years ago."

In the earliest days, cross-country was a boys-only sport.

"We had a couple girls who came out and ran with our boys that first fall, but girls didn't run separately until 1974, I think it was," Smith said. "But even then, they only ran 3,000 meters because of the prevailing myth that girls weren't as strong as boys and would have a hard time running 3 miles. And the truth is, they're better at it than

guys, at least proportionately.

"I vividly remember Maria Large setting the record at Sugar Hollow (in 1980). ... I can see her rounding the corner and hitting that last little stretch of 50 yards like she was gliding, that long, blond hair floating behind her. I was at the finish line with a stopwatch, and I said, 'My gosh, guys, she's going under 17.' And when she came in at 16:58, we were just in awe."

Smith is proud of the fact that he helped convince the VHSL to recognize girls cross-country on a regional and state level beginning in 1980, just as he's proud of the course at Sugar Hollow.

"It's set on a TVA dam, which is neat," said Smith, who last coached

in 2000. "So it's very scenic. In fact, at one time the kids wanted to print a T-shirt that said, 'Sugar Hollow — best course by a dam site,' but I thought the central office might frown on that.

"The course is spectator-friendly, and it has those hills to challenge runners while offering flat ground across the dam to where you can open it up to gain time. And there's also a strategy for gaining 3, 4, 5 seconds running down the hills, too, so it's a great mix."

Smith will soon move back to North Carolina to enjoy his golden years with Mary Sue, a Meadowview girl and his wife of 51 years. But he'll always be known for leaving his fingerprints all over the cross-country

scene of Southwest Virginia — and Sugar Hollow.

For one thing, every year they hold a meet there that bears his name.

"When (Battle coach) Whitney (Ball) first told me (in 2007) that they were going to have a meet named after me, I said, 'Don't you have to die for that to happen?'" Smith joked. "But she said that it wasn't 'in memory of,' it was 'in honor of.' And I am honored.

"A lot's happened in 50 years — I used to be taller than the pine trees at the finish line, but now they're 50 feet high — and it boggles my mind it's passed all so fast. But it's good. Whenever I get to talk about cross-country and Sugar Hollow, it all makes me smile."

CLASSIC

From Page B1

Hoofnagle said. "The trees are a lot bigger, and the memories start to come flooding back. Once you start walking out on the course, it all seems

fresh again.

"It's great to see all of these people honored. It really takes great people to make a great course. Frankie was one of my idols because I was just a freshman when he was a senior."

Even runners who pre-date the current course

showed up for the first time in some years. Pat Henner — a former Virginia High runner who helped lay the foundation for the Bearcat dynasty in the early '80s and a current University of Georgia coach — came up on a recruiting visit and was stunned by the size of

the meet.

"It's amazing being back here, and I absolutely love this place," Henner said. "It's mostly about the people. I got to see Gene Walker and Randy Smith, who I probably haven't seen in 30 years.

"The old course that I ran still holds a lot of the

same elements and atmosphere of being hilly and tough with a lot of changes of momentum. It sticks to the original intent."

Helmer and Large could not be at the ceremony due to some conflicts but were honored with plaques. Still, the day was

a massive success, and to have a lot of the course's history come out for a celebration speaks volumes.

"When you get old like I am, you can look back, smile and feel good about it because you feel like you made an impact on someone. It all comes full circle," Smith said.

Abingdon sweeps Randy Smith cross-country titles

By TANNER COOK
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BRISTOL, Va. — The grounds of the 3-mile cross-country course at Sugar Hollow Park have seen numerous historic days over the last 50 years.

The 16th Randy Smith Classic on Thursday will go down as one of its biggest, as more than 40 high schools from five states were represented and more than 1,000 runners competed. It is believed to be the largest meet ever staged at the park and in Southwest Virginia.

And all the accolades went to Abingdon — one of the region's historically dominant programs.

Senior star Makaleigh Jessee took her second win of the season with a quick time of 18:14.2 and led the Lady Falcons to a low score of 29 points.

On the boys side, junior Rives Boltwood led the charge for the Falcons with a winning time of 16:03.9. The defending Class 3 state champion Falcons took the team crown with 33 points.

JESSEE GOES WIRE-TO-WIRE

Jessee took the lead from the start and virtually ran the entire race by herself.

It was her second individual title at the meet, matching the one from the spring season of 2021. Her time on Thursday was a personal best for the course, but it is still well off of the school's all-time best mark on the course of 17:28.0 set in 1986 by Katrina Berkley.

"I wanted to go out pretty fast, and I did, but the wind and a lot of spectators on the course today ..." Jessee said. "The race went OK, but the conditions weren't the best."

Rounding out the team scoring for Abingdon were Josie Jackson (fourth, 19:20.4), Amanda Ferrante (fifth, 20:03.9), Cecelia Johnson (12th, 20:25.1) and Aleah Dorn (15th, 21:05.5).

It was a good team effort for the Lady Falcons, who currently lead all of Class 3, as Jessee is the top individual.

"It's great to have competition out here, and especially being on a course that we know so well," Jessee said.

"It's good to see where everyone is at this point in the season. We have some pretty big goals for the team

this year."

George Wythe — which finished fourth with 129 — has won the last three Class 1 state titles and will again be the favorite in November.

Jefferson Christian Academy's Violet Wall finished runner-up in 18:47.1 while Tennessee High's Zoe Arrington was third in 19:13.7.

North Buncombe (North Carolina) finished as team runner-up with 50 points while Volunteer was third with 100.

The Lady Falcons got a solid performance out of Jacie Begley, who finished eighth in 20:16.0.

BOLTWOOD BREAKS EARLY

The junior Boltwood has led the Falcons all season in the absence of Jack Bundy and finally got the opportunity to shine on Thursday with the win.

"I would've loved to have gone sub-16, but it is what it is," Boltwood said. "I'm very happy to finally win on this course, though. I've run on this thing what seems like 15 times, and the best I had ever done was second or third. A win feels pretty great."

The Falcons were also able to put the entire team together for the first time this season.

Bundy returned from a stress fracture in his foot while Todd Pillion II returned from a rib injury.

"It feels great to have our top seven back together for the first time this season," Boltwood said. "It's crazy that it's this late in the season."

The scoring for Abingdon was rounded out by Gregory Poisson (third, 16:22.2), Bramley Childress (fifth, 16:31.4), Bundy (ninth, 17:08.1) and Pillion (17th, 17:29.1).

The team competition was deep, as defending Class 2 state champion Union was runner-up with 138, and Class 1 state favorite Lebanon was third with 153.

"There are some really good runners here, and this was by no means an easy race," Boltwood said. "I managed to pull out the win, though."

Derek Mitchell led the way for the Pioneers with a runner-up finish in 16:14.5 while Dorian Almer led the Bears with a 10th-place showing (17:16.9).



The Abingdon cross-country teams swept the titles at Thursday's Randy Smith Classic. The girls set a meet record low 29 points while the boys scored 33.



Abingdon senior Makaleigh Jessee ran away with Thursday's Randy Smith Classic individual title, running 18:14.2. It was her second win of the season, following her Fender's Farm crown two weeks ago.



Abingdon junior Rives Boltwood runs toward the finish with wide open arms en route to the win at the Randy Smith Classic at Sugar Hollow in Bristol, Virginia. Boltwood's time was 16:03.9.

Results

16th Randy Smith Classic
Sugar Hollow Park, Bristol
3 miles
Thursday, Sept. 29

Girls
Course Record: Maria Large, Virginia High (16:58.0 in 1980)

Meet Record: Kelsey Harrington, Virginia High (17:43.0 in 2019)

Team Results
1 Abingdon 29, 2 North Buncombe (NC) 50, 3 Volunteer 100, 4 George Wythe 129, 5 Grundy 154, 6 Tennessee High 156, 7 John S. Battle

183, 8 Virginia High 226, 9 Sullivan East 264, 10 Union 294, 11 Rural Retreat 303, 12 West Ridge 316, 13 Providence Academy 330, 14 Rye Cove 358, 15 Marion 380, 16 Richlands 392.

Top 15 Individual Finishers

1 Makaleigh Jessee (A) 18:14.2, 2 Violet Wall (JCA) 18:47.1, 3 Zoe Arrington (THS) 19:13.7, 4 Josie Jackson (A) 19:20.4, 5 Amanda Ferrante (A) 20:03.9, 6 Avery Mays (NB) 20:06.4, 7 Abigail Rhudy (Taz) 20:09.8, 8 Jacie Begley (Vol) 20:16.0, 9 Eowyn Warner (WolfHills) 20:20.0, 10 Jessi Looney (Gru) 20:21.8, 11 Katie Johnson (NB) 20:22.4, 12 Cecelia Johnson (A) 20:25.1, 13 Eden Barnwell (NB) 20:43.9, 14 Alexis Porter (Gru) 20:45.8, 15 Aleah Dorn (A) 21:05.5.

Boys

Course Record: Fleet Hower, Marion (14:26.0 in 2001)

Meet Record: Brad Swiney, John S. Battle (15:09.0 in 2014)

Team Results

1 Abingdon 33, 2 Union 138, 3 Lebanon 153, 4 Volunteer 161, 5 North Buncombe (NC) 181, 6 Sullivan East 196, 7 Tennessee High 197, 8 Jefferson Christian Academy 207, 9 Wolf Hills Home School 228, 10 Providence Academy 288, 11 Grundy 342, 12 Tazewell 404, 13 Carroll County 405, 14 Auburn 434, 15 Virginia High 451, 16 Marion 473, 17 John S. Battle 481, 18 Princeton Sr. (WV) 501, 19 Oak Hill Academy 506, 20

Unicoi County 515, 21 West Ridge 541, 22 George Wythe 544, 23 Lee High 560, 24 Eastern Montgomery 566, 25 Gate City 600, 26 Rural Retreat 805, 27 Rye Cove 810.

Top 15 Individual Finishers

1 Rives Boltwood (A) 16:03.9, 2 Derek Mitchell (Leb) 16:14.5, 3 Gregory Poisson (A) 16:22.2, 4 Kaleb Elswick (Gru) 16:30.2, 5 Bramley Childress (A) 16:31.4, 6 Adam Gibson (CW) 16:35.0, 7 Alec Deckard (Leb) 16:46.3, 8 Roman Borghetti-Metz (Vol) 16:53.3, 9 Jack Bundy (A) 17:08.1, 10 Dorian Almer (U) 17:16.9, 11 Charlie Wilson (Vol) 17:18.0, 12 James Stalnaker (JCA) 17:24.0, 13 Keyston Hartford (Gru) 17:24.5, 14 Chad Douglas (U) 17:24.7, 15 Eli Taylor (Leb) 17:25.1.



Football to basketball transition comes fast for these players

On Nov. 8, 1974, Marion snagged a season-ending, 13-9 upset of Richlands in a Southwest District football game that was played at Tazewell High School. It was just Marion's second win of a 2-7-1 season, but it sure felt good to end a sorry year on a high note.

The ride home on that Smyth County school bus was the place to be, with lots of laughter and horseplay as we wound our way back through Thompson Valley and Broadford, avoiding the sickening trip across the three mountains on Route 16.

As we rode along, Marion assistant coach Larry Sayers left his front seat and walked to the rear of the bus. On his way back up front, he leaned down in the dark and whispered something from behind a couple of unsuspecting players — and it wasn't music to our ears. "Tomorrow morning, 8 o'clock," said Sayers, who was also Marion's head basketball coach.

Yes, we were given 10 hours to shift from football to basketball. No sleeping in on Saturday. Bumps and bruises aside, there was no waiting until Monday. Roundball practice had begun Nov. 1, so two or three of Marion's projected starters were already a week behind.

The transition is a tough one, to be sure. Basketball is a different kind of "shape" than football, using different muscles and using different moves and actions. A new soreness rears its head.

And as for the skills end of it, "rusty" is the first word to come to mind. It takes time to adjust and to rediscover a shooting stroke that's been on the shelf for a few (or several) months.

Kids specialize in particular sports today way more than they did 50 years ago, but there are still a few who play both varsity football and varsity basketball, and Bristol has its share.

Tennessee High has three such athletes (Maddox Fritts, Jimmy Phipps and Josh Sizemore), as does John Battle (Broadie Bailey, Brayden Emerson and Jesse Owens). Virginia High has at least one, Dante Worley, and he's of all-star caliber. Four other Bearcats, all underclassmen and football players, are battling for coveted spots on varsity.

At Tennessee High, where he enters his third season as Vikings head coach, Michael McMeans is quick to embrace his football boys. "All three bring toughness that a good basketball team needs," McMeans said. "They will all be in our eight-man rotation."

And they will certainly help the Vikings. "They are physical and great defenders and rebounders," McMeans said. "All three can also shoot the ball pretty good and are a threat to finish around the basket."

Tennessee High has streaked to a hot start for the 2022-23 season, beating Dobyns-Bennett, Greeneville, South Greene and West Greene in Hall of Champions benefit games (real games that do not count toward the number of contests allowed by the TSSAA).

The Vikings were finishing their football season when McMeans and his team began practice Oct. 31. The trio missed the first week of basketball workouts because Tennessee High's playoff football team didn't end its season until Nov. 4.

Perhaps by now, three weeks later, the threesome might be settling into a basketball routine. But basketball shape is different. Basketball uses more quick-twitch muscles than football.

And unlike football, where there can be 40 seconds of rest between snaps, basketball can be played at breakneck speed for a minute or two when teams are pressing on one end and breaking the press on the other. And the officials are letting 'em play.

"Basketball is constant movement up and down the floor," McMeans said. "In basketball you can go several minutes before you stop, then you go right back to that pace. So it's hard.

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Musick has Vikings thinking big

"Everybody's bought in, and everyone believes we can do it (go to the state finals). So that's our goal."

— Creed Musick, senior at Tennessee High

By **TREY WILLIAMS**
FOR BRISTOL NOW

Creed Musick was this close to playing in a state basketball tournament for Michael McMeans as a freshman at Sullivan South.

But a pandemic benched the Rebels shortly before their state quarterfinal game in Murphy Center, and McMeans and Musick, thanks in part to South closing its high school doors in 2021, went their separate ways for the ensuing two seasons.

Musick, however, reunited with McMeans at Tennessee High this past summer, and if an early season waltz past defending state champion Dobyns-Bennett is any indication, the duo still could get a shot in Murfreesboro.

The 6-foot-3 Musick, a productive player for Boone the past two seasons, scored a career-high 31 points in the Vikings' 81-64 defeat of D-B on Nov. 17 at Viking Hall. Granted, D-B was missing a returning starter and a projected starter, but the victory was impressively convincing. The Vikings scored 50 in the first half.

"We worked hard preparing for that game," Musick said, "because we knew coming into it — I mean, they won the state championship last year."

Musick hungers for a shot at a state tournament after one was taken off the table in 2020. Led by guards Ben Diamond and Cole Lane and forward Gannon Chase, South arrived in Murfreesboro on a roll in March of 2020. But COVID-19 put zeroes on the clock before it started.

"I remember we were at the walk-through getting ready to go, and then Coach McMeans broke the news to us that they canceled it," Musick said. "It was really just a shock to everybody. After the season we had, we were ready to go down there to Murfreesboro and play. It didn't feel real. I mean, it was just crazy to realize that we had done all of that — and just the opportunity we didn't get."

Opportunity could once again knock. "I mean, we really feel that we can get back to that point that we were at that freshman year at South," Musick said. "I really feel like we have all the pieces to do it. We have the team to do it."

"Everybody's bought in, and everybody believes we can do it. So that's our goal."

Granted, each knows a lot of variables must fall into place to reach the state quarterfinals, but a sense of unfinished business has reemerged since McMeans and Musick have reconnected.

"Creed's like, 'I want to get back to Murfreesboro,'" McMeans said. "He's like, 'That's my No. 1 goal. We were so close. I want to experience that.' And he's like, 'I want you to experience it too.'"

"It always broke my heart at South because I knew I was gonna get to coach another year, you know, but those kids — the seniors — were not going to have another chance to play. So that's what breaks your heart. ... I think he's got a little bit of a chip on his shoulder because we were so close, and that's something he wants to experience."

The understandable assumption concerning Musick's transfer from Boone to Tennessee High would be that McMeans actively pursued his former player or vice versa — or both.

But McMeans started his coaching career working for Boone coach Chris Brown at Volunteer, and they remain friends. Never mind the fact that you don't



PHOTOS BY EDDY GRAY

Creed Musick goes in for a dunk against defending state champion Dobyns-Bennett.



have to be around McMeans long to realize you'd only run into him while taking the high road.

McMeans wouldn't raid Brown. And Musick wasn't fleeing him.

"I really liked Coach Brown," Musick said. "I had a great experience with him after going over there sophomore year. It was great playing with him, and he really just taught me a lot and helped me out a lot."

"The reason we had to move was because my dad's business, and he was

doing a lot of stuff up here in Bristol. So it was just the best for my family."

McMeans said he first heard he might be coaching Musick again after Musick's mother emailed Tennessee High athletic director Barry Wade in the offseason. The Musicks, she wrote, were buying a house in Bristol.

"Barry's like, 'According to this, they're looking at moving to Bristol, and he wants to try out for basketball,'" McMeans said.

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Arby's Classic schedule set for loaded field

By **TANNER COOK**
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In a few weeks, high school basketball teams will descend upon Viking Hall for the 39th Arby's Classic tournament.

The event has long been one of the premier prep showcases in the country, and this year is no exception, with out-of-state teams coming from North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania and New York.

The drawings for the schedule took place Nov. 20 at the West State Street Arby's, as local teams picked up their first-round foes would be.

The first to draw was Gate

City, which is back in the tournament for the first time since 2019. Head coach John-Reed Barnes and the Blue Devils will face Christ School out of Arden, North Carolina, in the tournament's first game on Tuesday, Dec. 27, at 1 p.m.

The Greenies won the 2011 edition of the Arby's.

"It's awesome to be back in it, and we get to play in front of local fans," Barnes said. "It's an awesome experience, and the atmosphere is great."

"Every team in this tournament is good, so when you reach into that bucket, it's like picking your poison."

Defending Class 4A state champion Dobyns-Bennett

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TANNER COOK/BRISTOL NOW

Tennessee High coach Michael McMeans places his squad on the bracket against Norcross (Georgia) on Nov. 20 at the drawing for the 39th Arby's Classic.

TRANSITION

From Page B1

“The movement — as far as shuffling your feet, playing in a low position and the sudden change of pace — is something that takes weeks and maybe a month or more to get into that shape.”

John Battle’s transition from

football to basketball presented no missed practices — the VHSL allowed practice to begin Nov. 7, three days after the Trojans ended their gridiron season.

The Trojans of fourth-year boss Steve Posey tipped off their basketball season Nov. 29.

Virginia High’s situation was a bit different. The Bearcats qualified for the football postseason and won their first-round playoff game before suffering a

season-ending defeat on Nov. 19.

Second-year Bearcats coach Julius Gallishaw gave Worley and his football brethren a few extra days to recover from the grind of a 12-game season, not requiring participation in basketball practice until the day after Thanksgiving, Nov. 25.

“I figured their bodies could use the rest,” Gallishaw said. Nonetheless, VHS will still open its season Nov. 30, and

chances are that Worley’s early-schedule skill set could show some rough edges compared to his polish of last March.

“Basketball requires a lot of skill that is hard to develop unless you are constantly working at it,” McMeans said, in general. “Shooting and handling the ball under pressure is hard, and that requires full-speed reps in practice and also game situations.

“You can’t hide anyone on a basketball floor. Only having five guys out there, if you can’t defend, shoot or handle the ball, you will be exposed very quickly.”

The Vikings, in the midst of a 12-day hiatus, return to the court Friday night when they travel for an anticipated matchup with rival West Ridge, led by high-scoring THS transfer Wade Witcher.

ARBY’S

From Page B1

drew North Mecklenburg out of North Carolina. The Vikings won the tournament in 2014 and 2017 while finishing runner-up in 2019.

Host Tennessee High drew Georgia 7A state champion Norcross. Class 3A defending state champion Greenville drew 2016 Arby’s champ Trinity out of Louisville.

Twin Springs was last to draw and drew Westminster Academy out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

“We’re excited to be back in it,” Titans coach Tyler Webb said. “It’s a chance for our guys to come play in one of the best tournaments in the country. (Westminster Academy)

has a lot of size, and that’s been an issue with us over the years. We’ll go out there and compete as hard as we can, though.”

Some other intriguing first-round matchups include Knox Fulton taking on pre-tournament favorites Myers Park of North Carolina and West Catholic Prep of Philadelphia meeting newcomer Madison-Ridgeland Academy of Mississippi.

“This year’s tournament is pretty loaded,” longtime tournament director Richard Ensor said. “Most of the good players we saw last year were seniors. Most of the good players we’ll see this year are sophomores and juniors. There’s one player coming in that’s one of the top 15 juniors in the country.”

The last local team to win the event was Science Hill in 1999.

MUSICK

From Page B1

“I was kind of like, ‘Okay.’ You’re sitting there thinking, ‘Yeah, he can for sure come try out.’”

But afterward McMeans heard nothing for a few weeks.

“And then it was the morning of our tryouts,” McMeans said, “and Chris calls me and was like, ‘Hey, is Creed really coming up there?’ He said he had kind of been talking about his dad’s business for a while. ... I was like, ‘Well, Chris, we’ve got tryouts about an hour from now. I guess if he shows up, we’ll know.’”

“I found out when everybody else found out. I mean, he walked into tryouts, and that’s when I found out about it.”

Musick was mindful about not stepping on any toes at the onset of summer practice. When McMeans asked for five players to take the court at the first practice, Musick didn’t budge.

“He stands on the sideline,” McMeans said, “and everybody’s kind of looking at him, like, ‘What are you doing? You’re one of the best players in the area. You need to be out there.’ And he’s like, ‘I ain’t earned nothing yet.’”

“And kind of at that point, when he said that, I knew we kind of had something special. And I knew with the other kids on our team saying, ‘No, get out there’ and ‘We need you out there’ type things, I kind of knew this was gonna be a good fit.”

The Vikings already had one of the area’s best scorers in 6-foot-6 Brandon Dufore, a senior who tallied 24 points and 12 rebounds against Dobyns-Bennett. Point guard Colin Brown scored 23 points against D-B, and guard Maddox Fritts helped hold talented Dante Oliver to one field goal.

Musick has meshed without so much as a hiccup.

“The kid scores 31 against D-B, and I didn’t realize he had that many,” McMeans said. “After the game, they’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, Creed had 31.’ I was like, ‘Dang, he had 31?’ But it’s just because he does everything within the flow of the offense. He doesn’t force anything. And he offensive rebounds so well.

“Through four games, he’s averaging 26 points, nine rebounds — five of those are on the offensive end — and he’s averaging four steals and four assists. He has a knack for the ball; it finds him.”

Musick shines flashes of his potential as a freshman at South. It was hardly a shock. McMeans had been hearing about him since he was “scoring

40 points” in middle school games at Sullivan Gardens.

Toughness also became apparent during Musick’s freshman season in the late stages of a 73-68 win at Sullivan East.

“I think we’d got in a little foul trouble, and he was in late and goes up and gets a rebound,” McMeans said. “And they hit him, and his head hit the floor, and it sounded like a shotgun go off. And we all thought, ‘Oh, gosh. This kid’s hurt.’”

“But, I mean, about the time that happens, he jumps right back up, goes up to the free throw and makes the free throw and then gets a steal the next possession for us. And I’m sitting over there thinking, ‘There’s no way this kid doesn’t have a concussion. We’ve got to get him out of the game.’ And I’m trying to get him out, and he’s yelling at me — as a freshman on the floor, ‘Leave me. Leave me. Leave me.’”

A stoppage in play came shortly thereafter.

“And our trainer got him and said, ‘Nah, he’s all right,’” McMeans said. “But that just kind of showed me what kind of potential he was gonna have down the road.”

Little could Musick have known he’d be realizing that potential for McMeans while playing at Tennessee High.

“The season we had at South my freshman year was amazing, us being able to go to state but then it getting canceled due to COVID,” Musick said. “It’s great to come back for this final chapter in my senior season.”

Musick will have opportunities for a new chapter in college. He has offers from Tusculum, Warren Wilson and Alice Lloyd, and he’s hearing from other programs.

“Creed finds a way to score,” McMeans said. “He scores off cuts. He can take you one on one. That’s why he’s so hard to guard. I mean, it’s not like you can really game-plan for him because as soon as you do, he’s just going to back-cut you and go get a layup, or he’s gonna go offensive rebound. You’re not going to keep him off the glass, I don’t care who you are. He just has that will to go get the ball and get put-backs and stuff.

“He’s unselfish, too. I mean, four assists — four or five — leads the area most of the time. He shares the ball with his teammates.”

Storybook seasons are few and far between, but the Vikings certainly have the proper prologue.

“It was a seamless transition,” McMeans said. “It’s funny how things work out. It was just kind of like it was meant to be for him to be here.”

Schedule

39th Arby's Classic at Viking Hall, Bristol

TUESDAY, DEC. 27

Game 1: Gate City vs. Christ School (NC), 1 p.m.

Game 2: Tabernacle Baptist (Bahamas) vs. Knox Webb, 2:30 p.m.

Game 3: Tennessee High vs. Norcross (Ga.), 4 p.m.

Game 4: West Catholic Prep (Pa.) vs. Madison-Ridgeland Academy (Miss.), 5:30 p.m.

Game 5: Greenville vs. Trinity (Ky.), 7 p.m.

Game 6: Myers Park (NC) vs. Knox Fulton, 8:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 28

Game 7: Loser Game 1 vs. Loser Game 2, 2:30 p.m.

Game 8: Winner Game 1 vs. Pace Academy (Ga.), 4 p.m.

Game 9: Westminster Academy (Fla.) vs.

Twin Springs, 5:30 p.m.

Game 10: Dobyns-Bennett vs. North Mecklenburg (NC), 7 p.m.

Game 11: St. Francis Prep (NY) vs. Winner Game 2, 8:30 p.m.

THURSDAY, DEC. 29

Game 12: Loser Game 3 vs. Loser Game 4, 9 a.m.

Game 13: Loser Game 5 vs. Loser Game 6, 10:30 a.m.

Game 14: Loser Game 8 vs. Loser Game 9, noon

Game 15: Loser Game 10 vs. Loser Game 11, 1:30 p.m.

Game 16: Winner Game 3 vs. Winner Game 4, 5 p.m.

Game 17: Winner Game 5 vs. Winner Game 6, 6:30 p.m.

Game 18: Winner Game 8 vs. Winner Game 9, 8 p.m.

Game 19: Winner Game 10 vs. Winner Game 11, 9:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, DEC. 30

Game 20: Winner Game 12 vs. Winner

Game 13, 9 a.m.

Game 21: Winner Game 14 vs. Winner Game 15, 10:30 a.m.

Game 22: Loser Game 16 vs. Loser Game 17, noon

Game 23: Loser Game 18 vs. Loser Game 19, 1:30 p.m.

Dick’s Sporting Goods Slam Dunk Contest: 5:30 p.m.

Game 24: Winner Game 16 vs. Winner Game 17, 7 p.m.

Game 25: Winner Game 18 vs. Winner Game 19, 8:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DEC. 31

Game 26: Winner Game 7 vs. Loser Game 12, 11:30 a.m.

Game 27: Winner Game 20 vs. Winner Game 21, 1 p.m.

Game 28: Winner Game 22 vs. Winner Game 23, 2:30 p.m.

Fun Factory 3-Point Contest: 4 p.m.

Game 29: Loser Game 24 vs. Loser Game 25, 5 p.m.

Game 30: Winner Game 24 vs. Winner Game 25, 6:30 p.m.

Johnson City awarded 2024 USA Softball National Championships

BRISTOL NOW

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Johnson City is set to host the 2024 USA Softball Girls’ Class A 12-Under and 16-Under National Championships.

The tournaments will take place at the Winged Deer Park Softball Complex from July 22 through July 28, 2024, a release from USA Softball said. These tournaments were awarded to Johnson City following voting by USA Softball commissioners at the USA Softball Annual Council meeting on Nov. 15.

USA Softball is the national governing body of softball in the United States. Johnson City has hosted USA Softball tournaments for over 30 years, with each tournament leaving a substantial economic impact on the community, the release said. Visit Johnson City previously hosted the Girls’ 14-Under National Championship in July 2021, a tournament that saw an economic impact of over \$2 million.

“Visit Johnson City is very excited to host not one, but two USA Softball tournaments in July of 2024. Winged Deer Park is an outstanding venue, and we are thrilled for these players to be able to not only play on brand-new



CONTRIBUTED/CITY OF JOHNSON CITY

The USA Softball 10 and Under Girls National Tournament was played at the Winged Deer Park Softball Complex in July 2019. Johnson City is conducting an expansion at Winged Deer Park that will add more softball and soccer fields at the facility. A local tourism official said the expansion will enable Johnson City to hold high-profile tournaments in one location.

turf fields but experience everything else that Johnson City has to offer,” said Kaitlyn Ricker, director of sports development at Visit Johnson City, in the release. “The city’s commitment to the development of four new turf fields at the Winged Deer Park Softball Complex played a large role in being

awarded these tournaments for not only 2024, but for 2023 as well.”

The four new turf fields at the Winged Deer Park Softball Complex are set to be completed in the summer of 2023, just in time for Visit Johnson City to host the 2023 USA Softball Girls’ Class A 18-Under National

Championship.

To learn more about USA Softball, visit teamusasoftball.com. To learn more about Visit Johnson City, go to VisitJohnsonCityTN.com. Please visit johnsoncitytexassoftball.com for more information about the 2024 USA Softball tournaments in Johnson City.



CONTRIBUTED

Johnson City will host the USA Softball Girls’ 18-Under Class A Fast Pitch National Championship at Winged Deer Park in 2023.



Brush with greatness: Carlos Lee spent time with legendary Steelers team

Not many librarians get a chance to play professional football, but Carlos Lee did. He came up a little short, but goodness ... a shot to play in the NFL? Who even thinks like that?

It just seemed like the next step for Lee, a multisport standout at Virginia High who had just earned 1978 first-team NAIA All-American status as a receiver at Concord College (now Concord University) in West Virginia.

And this wasn't with any of the NFL dregs — this was with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"There was a (Steelers) scout who came to Concord and took me through a workout, and he said he liked what he saw," said Lee, a Bristol Virginia Public Schools employee the last 42 years as a library media specialist and a multisport coach. "So then he said we need to get your height and weight, and so I weighed 165 or 170 pounds and measured 5-foot-9 1/2."

The scout frowned. "That's a problem," he said. "They want you at least 5-10 before they'll consider drafting you."

"OK, so let's measure again," Lee suggested.

But this wasn't the man's first rodeo.

"No, I know what you're going to do, and that ain't going to work," the scout said. "And I must be honest, because if they end up drafting you and you're not 5-10, then that costs me my job."

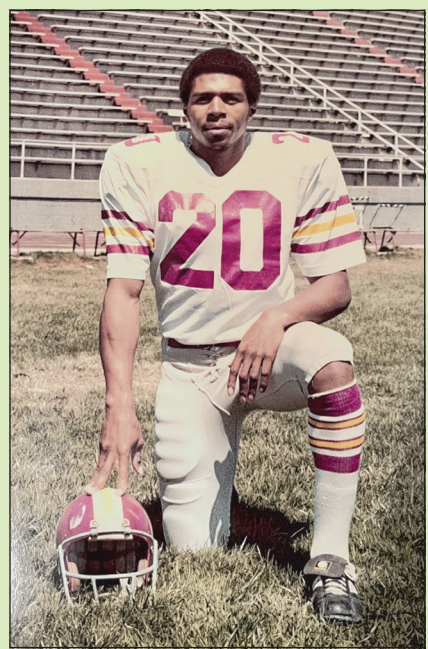
Lee understood, so he barked up a different tree.

"I had a friend who lived in Pittsburgh whose dad knew a lawyer who was friends with some people with the Steelers," Lee said. "So he called and talked to them and told them that they needed to take a look at me, and that's how all of that happened."

"Before their 1979 mini-camp, I went up and went through workouts and everything. They offered to sign me to a free-agent contract and even guaranteed me playoff money (if he earned a roster spot). I wondered how that could be, but they knew what they had."

These were the Chuck Noll Steelers, who would win their

See **LEE**, Page B2



CONTRIBUTED
Carlos Lee at Concord College, where he was scouted by the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Sweeping revenge

Tennessee High takes District 1-AA volleyball title against Sullivan East



JEFF BIRCHFIELD/BRISTOL NOW
Sullivan East's Jenna Hare gets ready to serve in the Lady Patriots' championship match against Tennessee High.

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**
jbirchfield@bristolnow.news

ERWIN, Tenn. — With revenge on its mind, Tennessee High wasted no time in winning the District 1-AA volleyball championship over Sullivan East at Unicoi County High School.

The top-seeded Lady Vikings rolled to a 3-0 (25-19, 27-25, 25-17) victory. It was the same week that coach Mary Johnson passed Peggy Dempsey as Tennessee High's all-time win leader. Dempsey was in attendance for Thursday's match, which Johnson certainly appreciated.

At the end of the evening, though, she said it was all about the girls with Three Rivers Conference player of the year Madison Blair leading the way with 14 kills and 12 digs and Marley Johns with another nine kills and five blocks.

"When Marley gets going, she is super hard to stop," Johnson said. "But it's really about our back row, getting the pass to Bree, and she will just put it on the tee for her. Marley will look over at the bench, but we're like, 'Go wherever you want to with the ball. You're pushing their hands back.' I'm hoping we can carry this into next week."

Both teams advanced to the Region 1-AA tournament.

The Lady Vikings were down 6-1 in the opening set before rallying to tie at 7-7.



JEFF BIRCHFIELD/BRISTOL NOW
Tennessee High's Marae Hermann and Marley Johns (9) got up for the block against Sullivan East's Jenna Hare (7).

Down 15-13 later, they reeled off seven straight points on their way to the set victory.

East rallied from an early 15-7 deficit to push Tennessee High to the limit in the second set. The Lady Vikings appeared on the verge of putting it away late, ahead 24-22 before the Lady Patriots clawed back again. The Lady Vikings finally won 27-25 on a well-placed serve.

Seven straight points midway through the final set proved to be too much to overcome, but East coach Tracy Graybeal was proud of her team's fight.

"We played three games Monday night, eight games Tuesday night, four games last night," Graybeal said. "We haven't been home before 10 o'clock all week. Part of it was our doing. We played with them tonight. Our season isn't over, and I'm thankful for that."

Hannah Hodge had nine kills and 15 digs, while Jenna Hare totaled eight kills and 10 blocks. Kylie Hurley was the defensive leader with 22 digs, and Carly Bradford finished with 12. Kyndi Hodge dished out 22 assists.

TOURNAMENT MVP

Tennessee High's Sophie Meade earned tournament MVP as her efforts included eight kills and nine digs in the championship match. She talked about coming back from the slow start to win the first set.

"We knew that was a really big game and needed to pull out a win," Meade said. "We knew we had leaders on the court who can turn the game around, and we've come behind before. Honestly, it was great to pull it out and go on and sweep them."

Another factor was the play of freshman

See **DISTRICT**, Page B2

Elizabethton student among Earnhardt Scholarship winners

BRISTOL NOW

Bristol Motor Speedway officials announced today that John Clavier of Elizabethton, Tennessee, and Chloe Holman of Essex, Missouri, are joint winners of the Dale Earnhardt Jr. Scholarship for 2022. Both students will be honored during pre-race ceremonies prior to the green flag for Saturday's Bass Pro Shops Night Race. They will walk across the pre-race stage, wave to the crowd and receive a check for \$2,088 and a commemorative plaque.

Clavier, a senior at Elizabethton High School, has been involved with volunteer projects over the past several years. He has also created content for his own YouTube channel and even won two awards at the inaugural 52 Film Fest in Johnson City, Tennessee, earlier this year. His plan for the future is to attend East Tennessee State



CONTRIBUTED
Chloe Holman, left, and John Clavier stand with Bristol Motor Speedway President Jerry Caldwell to receive the Dale Earnhardt Jr. Scholarship.

See **WINNERS**, Page B2

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MEMBER FDIC

LEE

From Page B1

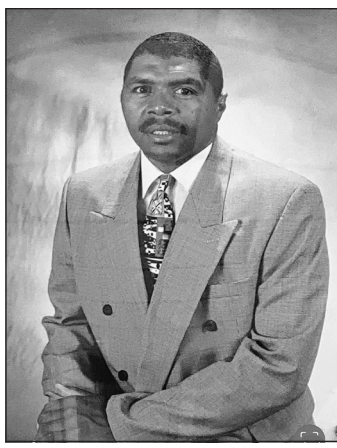
fourth Super Bowl in six years that season. There were a whopping 12 future NFL Hall of Famers on that '79 team, including Noll.

"I was there with all of those guys — Joe Greene, Jack Lambert, Jack Ham, Donnie Shell, Mel Blount ... and that's just the defense," Lee said. "There was also Franco Harris, Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann and John Stallworth ... (and Mike Webster)."

And there was another one.

"There was this other guy who was a defensive back (who'd played with Pittsburgh the prior two seasons but would eventually be cut in '79 before hooking up with the 49ers), and he went on to the Hall of Fame, too. One time I'd run a pass pattern, and as I jogged back to the huddle, I overheard the defensive back coach tell the line-backer coach, 'That kid is going to be a great coach one day,' and it was Tony Dungy they were talking about. They hit it right on the nose."

Lee did more than just rub elbows with the stars.



CONTRIBUTED

Carlos Lee now works as Virginia High's head golf coach and an assistant on multiple sports teams and is a library media specialist for Bristol Virginia Public Schools.

He made an impression and stuck around for a while and might have caught on for good had Swann won a lawsuit that summer.

The lawsuit stemmed from a vicious, blindsided cheapshot Oakland Raiders defensive back George Atkinson had given Swann during a prior season.

"When I got there, Swann was going through a lawsuit in San Francisco," Lee said. "And word we got was that he wouldn't be back to play if he won that thing. That's why they were taking a hard look at us because

they were maybe needing another receiver.

"So when we had the mini-camp, my friend from Pittsburgh told me he'd read an article in the newspaper where they asked Bradshaw if anybody had caught his eye, and Bradshaw had said there was one receiver who caught about every pass thrown his way. And my friend asked me how I did catching the ball, and I said I had caught about everything thrown to me, so he suggested that maybe Bradshaw was talking about me."

Ultimately, however, Swann returned to the Steelers, and the ax finally fell on Lee.

"I was there until the next-to-the-last cut," Lee said. "I was there for about a week after Swann came back, but after an exhibition game, I was told that the general manager wanted to see me and for me to bring my playbook, so I kind of figured what was coming."

"When they released me, they asked if I would like to go to Canada and play, but that I'd have to be an under-the-table player because they were well into their season by then, and they were only allowed to have so many Americans on their roster.

Plus, I'd hurt my back when I was in camp, so I figured I'd just come back home and finish my degree and go from there."

Lee, the nephew of famed VHS coach Ballard Lee, returned to Concord to complete his double major (physical education and library science) degree and has never looked back, unless someone brings up his outstanding playing days.

And there is a lot to recall, like scoring four touchdowns as a junior in a 53-27 rout of Marion, a win that thrust Virginia High on to the 1973 championship of the 10-team Southwest District and eventually the Region IV title and a rare trip to the Group AA semifinals.

"Maybe my best memory from that year came down at Gate City," Lee said. "Raphael (Cansler) and Mike Worrell were our captains, and when we were in the locker room before the game, (Gate City) brought that steam whistle right past where we were."

"Well, those two jumped up and said, 'We better not hear that again!' And they were our leaders who we looked up to, so we made sure we got it done, and we beat them (19-12) that night."

But it was at Concord

where Lee, who'd also been a star baseball outfielder and a 15-point-per-game scorer in basketball while at VHS, really blossomed after moving from running back to wide receiver following his freshman season.

By the time Lee finished with the Mountain Lions, he was either first or second on their career list for receptions, reception yards, touchdown receptions and yards per catch, in addition to being among the all-time leaders as a kick returner and especially a punt returner.

Lee, now 66 years old, was inducted into the Concord Hall of Fame in 1996.

"I'd always run north-south as a running back, but when I started returning punts in college, I realized I had to use my moves and my instincts," Lee said. "And I had some guys who were very excited to block for me and took a lot of pride in it."

"So my first season as a wide out, every day after practice, our quarterback, Jeff Broyles, would ask me to stay and get in extra work — and I think that's what developed me into a pretty good receiver. Funny thing was, by the time we finished, the cafeteria would be closed, and

I'd have no way to get dinner. So I trained myself to just go on to sleep and get up early for breakfast."

These days, Lee is Virginia High's head golf coach and an assistant with both the baseball and girls basketball programs, as well as the media specialist at Van Pelt Elementary.

His son, C.J., who played three years of professional baseball in the Braves organization, has given him two grandsons, one a promising 6-4 basketball player at Virginia Middle School and the other a third grader at Van Pelt, right under Lee's passionate eye.

The former Bearcat great doesn't know exactly when he'll give up teaching — he wants to continue to coach even after he retires from the classroom — but when he does, maybe he'll spend more time thinking back on his moment with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"It was a great experience, I must say," Lee said. "I have fond memories, and I learned a lot."

"But for me right now, what I love is these kids. I have bus duty every morning where I welcome them, and most of 'em will give me a hug. That's pretty special and hard to beat, it really is."

DISTRICT

From Page B1

Bree Adams, who totaled 35 assists, and libero Syndee Pendland with 11 digs. It was extra sweet for the Lady Vikings after East had beaten them last year in both the district and region championships. Johns commented, "It was kind of like a payback thing."

She and Blair certainly took over in the final set with their powerful play at the net.

"It was very competitive, and we knew it was going to be a hard-fought match," Blair said. "The revenge factor played a lot into tonight. We lost twice last year, so we held on to that. I'm proud of us that we used that as fuel. We came out and killed it and got the victory."

WINNERS

From Page B1

University and major in media and communications with a focus in radio, TV and film.

Holman attends the University of Northwestern Ohio (UNOH). As a kid, she remembers always wanting to be a crew chief for her race car driver father and now helps him with social media and live timing. She also had the opportunity to work at Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the "Month of May," a full month of events at the revered track leading up to the prestigious Indianapolis 500. Her plan for the future is to move over to the marketing and public relations side of motor sports and

help drivers find sponsorships and money to continue their racing careers.

Created by Bristol Motor Speedway in 2017 as a retirement gift to Earnhardt Jr., the annual scholarship awards the winning student a one-time payment of \$2,088 to assist with all college costs, including tuition, housing, books and supplies. Past winners of the BMS Dale Earnhardt Jr. Scholarship are Jaicee Weaver (2018) and Jace Ketron (2019), both of Tennessee High School in Bristol, Tennessee, and Knoxville, Tennessee, student Caleb James Cate (2021), who attends UNOH.

In order to be eligible, students must be a senior at one of the 21 designated high schools or attend one of the eight designated colleges and universities in the Appalachian

Highlands region surrounding Bristol Motor Speedway, or a student at the speedway's official partnering institution, UNOH in Lima, Ohio.

The 21 designated high schools are Abingdon High School; Chuckey-Doak High School; Cloudland High School; Daniel Boone High School; David Crockett High School; Doby's-Bennett High School; Elizabethton High School; Greeneville High School; Hampton High School; Happy Valley High School; Holston High School; John S. Battle High School; North Greene High School; Patrick Henry High School; Tennessee High School; Science Hill High School; South Greene High School; Sullivan East High School; Virginia High School; West Greene High School and West

Ridge High School.

The nine designated higher educational institutions are East Tennessee State University; Emory & Henry College; King University; Milligan University; Northeast State Technical Community College; Tennessee College of Applied Technology, Elizabethton; Tusculum University; the University of Virginia's College at Wise and the University of Northwestern Ohio.

One of the most iconic race car drivers of all time, Earnhardt Jr. serves as an analyst for NBC Sports' NASCAR Cup and Xfinity Series race coverage and contributes to additional motor sports programming across NBC Sports. In addition to race coverage, Earnhardt hosts "The Dale Jr. Download," a weekly

interview program focused on motor sports, and "Lost Speedways," a Peacock Original, that visits abandoned speedways. Voted by fans as NASCAR's Most Popular Driver for an unprecedented 15 consecutive years (2003-17), Earnhardt, a 26-time winner in the NASCAR Cup Series, including two Daytona 500s, is a third-generation driver who followed his legendary father Dale Earnhardt Sr. and his grandfather, Ralph Earnhardt, into the sport. As a team owner, Earnhardt founded and manages JR Motorsports, which fields four full-time entries in the NASCAR Xfinity Series. In the summer of 2020, Earnhardt was selected to the NASCAR Hall of Fame Class of 2021.

Region's 53rd Fall Bird Count tallies one-day total of 125

By **BRYAN STEVENS** FOR BRISTOL NOW

The 53rd consecutive Elizabethton Fall Count was held Saturday, Sept. 24, and conducted by 26



Bryan Stevens

observers in nine parties. The weather was cool and cloudy, with scattered light showers in most areas. Counters covered parts of Carter County and territory in the adjacent counties of Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington.

According to longtime count compiler Rick Knight, participants tallied 125 species, which is exactly the average of the last 30 years.

The all-time high for the count was 137 species in 1993. Conversely, the lowest total in the last 30 years was 102 species in 1999.

Along with Rob Armistead, I counted birds around Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park and the linear walking trail along the Watauga River in Elizabethton.

The highlights of our morning included good looks at a male prairie warbler and some common mergansers on the river.

THE LIST

Canada goose, 881; wood duck, 50; blue-winged teal, 3; mallard, 195; American black duck, 1; and common merganser, 6. Northern bobwhite, 6; wild turkey, 50; and pied-billed grebe, 1. Rock pigeon, 477; Eurasian collared-dove, 8; mourning dove, 248; yellow-billed cuckoo, 3; common nighthawk, 1;

chimney swift, 91; and ruby-throated hummingbird; 18.

Virginia rail, 2; sora, 1; killdeer, 12; semipalmated sandpiper, 1; and Wilson's snipe, 1.

Double-crested cormorant, 30; great blue heron, 25; great egret, 5; and green heron, 4.

Black vulture, 43; turkey vulture, 82; osprey, 8; Northern harrier, 1; sharp-shinned hawk, 1; Cooper's hawk, 5; bald eagle, 4; red-shouldered hawk, 7; and red-tailed hawk, 9.

Eastern screech-owl, 19; great horned owl, 7; barred owl, 4; belted kingfisher, 25; red-headed woodpecker, 8; Red-bellied woodpecker, 69; yellow-bellied sapsucker, 2; downy woodpecker, 32; hairy woodpecker, 24; Northern flicker, 50; and pileated woodpecker, 29.

American kestrel, 24; merlin, 1; and peregrine falcon, 2.

Great crested flycatcher, 1; Eastern wood-pewee, 12; Acadian flycatcher, 1; Empidonax species, 1; Eastern phoebe, 93; White-eyed vireo, 4; yellow-throated vireo, 3; blue-headed vireo, 15; and red-eyed vireo 11.

Blue jay, 415; American crow, 436; fish crow, 2; common raven, 11; tree swallow, 130; and barn swallow, 6.

Carolina chickadee, 167; tufted titmouse, 136; red-breasted nuthatch, 7; white-breasted nuthatch, 51; house wren, 9; winter wren, 1; marsh wren, 1; Carolina wren, 157; blue-gray gnatcatcher, 1; golden-crowned kinglet, 4; and ruby-crowned kinglet, 3.

Veery, 2; gray-cheeked thrush, 5; Swainson's thrush, 85; American robin, 271; gray catbird, 37; brown thrasher, 9;

Northern mockingbird, 69; and European starling, 453. Cedar waxwing, 225; house sparrow, 28; house finch, 52; red crossbill, 2; and American goldfinch, 145.

Chipping sparrow, 72; field sparrow, 19; dark-eyed junco, 17; song sparrow, 83; Eastern towhee, 59; Eastern meadowlark, 17; and red-winged blackbird, 67.

Ovenbird, 4; worm-eating warbler, 1; Northern waterthrush, 2; black-and-white warbler,

13; Tennessee warbler, 57; Orange-crowned warbler, 1; Nashville warbler, 3; Common yellowthroat, 15; hooded warbler, 4; American redstart, 34; Cape May warbler, 18; Northern parula, 10; Magnolia warbler, 25; bay-breasted warbler, 16; Blackburnian warbler, 11; chestnut-sided warbler, 5; black-throated blue warbler, 15; palm warbler, 96; pine warbler, 6; Yellow-rumped warbler, 5; yellow-throated warbler, 1; Prairie warbler, 2; black-throated green warbler, 17; and Canada warbler, 1.

Summer tanager, 1; scarlet tanager, 14; rose-breasted grosbeak, 65; blue grosbeak, 2; and indigo bunting, 5.

Some notable misses, according to Knight, were ruffed grouse, broad-



SIMARDFRANCOIS/PIXABAY

A single great crested flycatcher was tallied during this year's Fall Bird Count conducted by members and friends of the Elizabethton Bird Club.

winged hawk, brown creeper, common grackle and brown-headed cowbird.

"Many thanks to all par-

ticipants for another good count," Knight remarked when posting the summary of the 2022 Fall Bird Count.

MOST COMMON SPECIES: ELIZABETHTON FALL COUNT

ILLUSTRATIONS VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

