

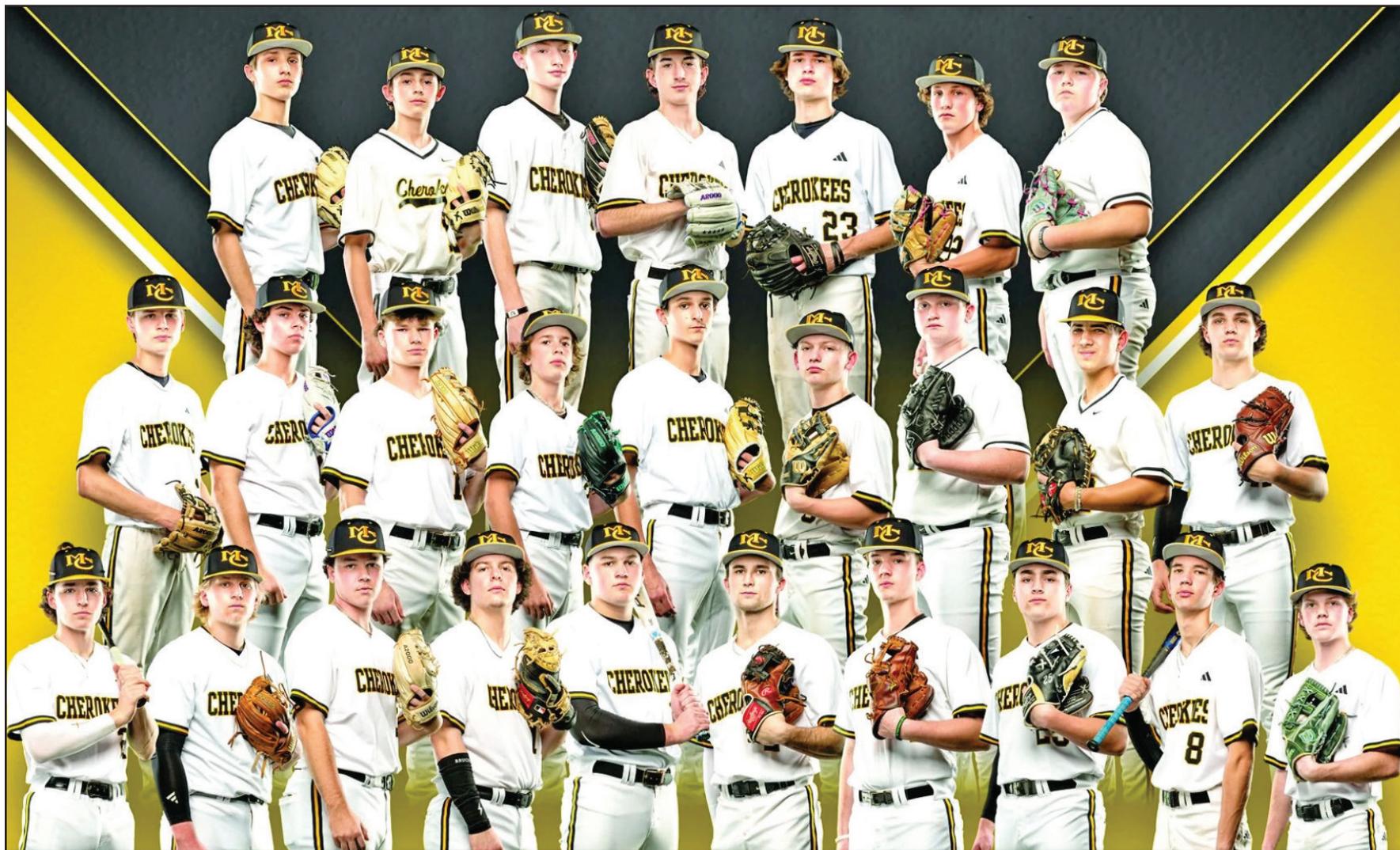
# *2025 Spring Sports Preview*



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# Baseball Cherokees seek to build toward 2025 success



McMinn County baseball lost a lot of talent from last year's Region 3-4A tournament third-place run, but returns a lot as well.

The result is a squad of Cherokees that head coach Matt Ray believes can round itself into a tough out as 2025 moves along – something that the Tribe's season-opening series against archrival and defending region champion Bradley Central may have indicated. McMinn took a run-rule loss in the first game of the spring to the Bears, only to turn around the next night and run-around Bradley right back.

"We have a very young and

inexperienced team but the ceiling is very high for them," Ray said. "With some games under their belt, I feel we will be really competitive and a tough team to beat. We have the potential to be very good defensively and very versatile on the offensive side."

Eight seniors are lost off last year's team, which was also the District 5-4A runner-up. Most notable among those are ace pitcher and also reliable hitter Ty Barnett, now at Cincinnati, current college players Hunter McDonald (Cleveland State), Mason Roderick (Carroll-Newman) and Rondon Fugate (Pellissippi State) and

clutch pitcher John Bryson. Another massive departure was a transfer, with Alabama commit Brooks Berry – son of Tennessee Wesleyan head coach Billy Berry – now at Baylor.

After all those losses, McMinn was left with just three returning position players, two returning pitchers and a handful of role players that will now be expected to step it up. But many of those returners are also highly touted players who have already shown glimpses of what they can do.

One Alabama commit remains for the Cherokees in junior Jaser Arms, who mans center field

and returns 20 hits including six doubles, two triples and a home run with 16 RBIs from last season. Sophomore Luke Lawson, a Division I prospect himself, is back after a freshman season of 31 hits with three doubles and 15 RBIs and plays at shortstop. Chase McDonald, also a sophomore, is McMinn's last returning position player at second base, having recorded 20 hits and 13 RBIs as a freshman.

The two returning pitchers are both sophomores, Max Roderick and Marshall Goodner, who saw

**SEE MCMINN BASEBALL, 26**

# Veteran baseball Chargers aiming for next step in 2025



Everyone is back for McMinn Central baseball, and expectations are naturally higher than ever for 2025.

With no losses to graduation or to transfers from last year's team that finished as the District 3-2A runner-up with a 16-15 record and reached the Region 2-2A tournament for the second straight year, the Chargers are looking to take that next step, which they believe can end in Murfreesboro.

"With everyone returning and having guys that have played every year since they were freshman we have high hopes," said

Central head coach Chris Shepherd.

The strength of the 25-man roster is the pitching staff, headlined by two college baseball signees. Tyler Oaks, signed with Western Carolina, brings back from last year 111 strikeouts in 70 innings. Zak Derrick, a Walters State signee, brings back six wins on the mound from 2024.

And backing both of them up is a solid No. 3 pitcher in senior Devon Paxton, who had a 1.83 ERA last year.

"We are anchored by three guys that could be No. 1 pitchers on a lot of

teams," Shepherd said.

All three of those pitchers were also key at the plate last year, with Oaks hitting .315 with 20 RBIs, 10 doubles and two home runs, Derrick .315 with 25 RBIs and Paxton coming up with clutch hits last spring.

Leading the batting lineup is junior Hunter Rayburn, who as a sophomore compiled a .366 batting average with 28 RBIs and 36 runs scored. Ayden Plemons, a senior who erupted in the latter half of last season, is the returning team leader in RBIs and game-winning hits. Bryce Hammond, also a junior, is a return-

ing All-District 3-2A player who did some of everything last year, and junior Kensen Wilcox makes the move from catcher to shortstop. Corbyn Frisbie, a sophomore, is looking to build off a solid freshman debut and great summer of development.

"Our lineup has pop and speed," Shepherd said. "With Hunter Rayburn leading the lineup we can score some runs. Looking to be more consistent at the plate and with that I see a lot runs that can be scored. Love this group and how they have grown as young men. They have high expectations

of themselves and are getting better every day. Excited how this season will play out."

The Chargers blasted Sequoyah 22-2 in their season opener, then fell in a competitive game at Alcoa 8-5 in a potential Class 2A sectional preview.

Rounding out Central's roster are Austin Jacobs, Zayne Leamon, Evan Preston, Ryne Moore, Keelon Witt, Kade Bowers, Evan Medina, AJ Bonnett, Austin Evans, Lucas Eaton, Evan James, Chase Nichols, Hudson Reed, Dylan Jacobs, Henry Woods, Blaine McKee and Kasson Davis.

# Baseball Tigers younger but more experienced for 2025



Meigs County baseball was young last year and will be even younger for 2025, though also with fair amount of experience.

As head coach Walker Malone enters his second season in charge, 19 of the Tigers' 23 players on roster are either freshmen or sophomores, compared to just two juniors and two seniors. Meigs lost four seniors to graduation from last year, three of them starters.

But several of the sophomores, in particular, are players who got

significant playing time as freshmen and will be counted on as Meigs seeks to improve on an 11-14 record from 2024.

"With that being said our few upperclassmen have had a lot of experience, as well as many of our underclassmen as we had many of those either start or play significant varsity innings a year ago as freshmen," Malone said. "We have a good group of newcomers to the program this year, as many of them will have a shot to contribute in some aspect right away as freshmen."

Two of Meigs' four All-District 3-2A players are back: sophomore Bowen Combs and junior Brody Goines. Combs is coming off an impressive freshman campaign in which he hit .391 with four doubles, a home run and 23 RBIs, while also stealing 33 bases. Goines batted .351 last year as a sophomore, with four doubles and 27 RBIs, while also pitching for a 3.5 ERA.

Four more sophomores, who also had significant playing time as freshmen, will also be part of the Tigers'

core, including Briar Roberts who hit .320 last year as a freshman, Eli Hope, Adam Mason and Tucker Brewer. Jaxon Hope, who sustained a season-ending knee injury last year, is also back as a junior, and he had batted .333 as a sophomore before his season got cut short.

Senior William Hogan will also be a key player for the Tigers.

Combs already got the season off to a hot start with a two-run home run in the Tigers' 4-3 opening win over Concord Christian,

while Tim Hull, a senior, hit the walk-off for the win. And two freshmen, Bleu Armour and Chris Hull, combined for 12 strikeouts on the mound in that game. Caden Crisp, also a freshman, got two hits against Concord.

Rounding out the freshman class are Maddux Andrews, Evan Ingham, Titus Fowler, Walt Hickman, Gunner Lunsford, Eli Sewell and Aden Ingham. Rounding out the sophomores are Isaac Hennessee, Wyatt Hopson, Colt Howard and Ethan Talley.

# Talented Sweetwater facing familiar challenge to start new season



Sweetwater baseball is in a familiar spot.

Coming off the heels of another appearance in the Class 2A state tournament, the Wildcats have a task sitting in front of them for the new season.

While the team is loaded with returning talents, not unlike the 2024 team faced in the early months, there will be new faces that will have to make quick strides for Sweetwater to accomplish similar things.

Twice in a row, Sweetwater has shown they have what it takes to handle the challenge. With four seniors and no juniors on the roster, the Wildcats will need their younger players to once again play with the best in the area.

“It is going to be a lot of new names and a lot of new faces. Guys are eager to get out there and excited to get going,” Sweetwater coach Travis Watson said. “They

understand what it takes to play at Sweetwater and it should be a fun year. We may take some lumps early, but I think if we are tough enough, we can hang in there and learn to be a team, hopefully, we are right there again.”

The team has established a winning culture after earning 57 wins and two state tournament berths over the past two seasons. As the roster has grown deeper with talent, so has the atmosphere around the team.

“We have had a lot of support from the community, especially in building up the facility,” Watson, who is entering his sixth season as head coach, said. “Having really good players has certainly helped. We have changed the outlook and changed the culture.

“Certainly players have bought into what we have asked them to do. They have played the way we want them to play and that is all

you can ask for.”

## New, old faces on the hill

The Wildcats have graduated a key number of pitchers, but there is a pool in place of players who have the opportunity to perform.

Sweetwater hopes to have Jayden Richesin return as a closer. One of the best relief options in East Tennessee, Richesin pitched 37.1 innings last season, striking out 22 batters and earning a 2.25 ERA.

Bryson Burgess is a candidate as a district game starter. As a freshman last year, Burgess tossed 40 innings with a 3.15 ERA.

He went three innings in Sweetwater’s win over Pigeon Forge to clinch a spot in the tournament as well as four innings at the Class 2A state tournament.

Meigs County transfer sophomore Ryder Scott is an option to have important innings early on.

“If that goes along as planned,

we will continue to throw Jayden out of the bullpen in that closing role,” Watson said. “If we feel like we have to use Jayden in a starting role then we certainly will. We will know as we get into the start of the season where these guys fit into roles.”

There are more options to pitch as well.

Senior Cooper Davies returns after throwing 12 innings last season. A trio of freshmen — Bryson Bonnough, Kolt Correll and Will Watson — all will have chances to earn innings as well.

Sophomores Gus Campbell and Ashten Brown join the fray.

“Those guys, we are hoping to get them opportunities and see where they fall into this pitching rotation,” Watson added.

## Taking the field

Sweetwater’s catcher position

**SEE SWEETWATER BB, 27**

# Sequoyah brings experienced team into new season, aims for gelling



Sequoyah baseball enters 2025 with a roster that is extremely experienced and eager to compete in the new season.

The Chiefs roster eight seniors and 12 upperclassmen in a team that is poised to return to a noticeably stout District 5-3A.

“Every year is special because you get to see guys that you’ve known for the last four years getting ready to enjoy their senior year baseball and graduate and go out into the world to do their own thing,” Sequoyah coach Josh Monhollen said. “You also get to meet a new class of freshmen. Every season brings a unique group of individuals together to try to work as one group and find success.”

## A number of options

Sequoyah returns five of its top six pitchers from last season — a staggering 139.5 innings.

Ryan Hall will lead the way with support from an experienced group in Levi Johnson (30.2

innings in 2024), Andru Sasser (24) and Luke Brackett (24).

Tristan Tipton pitched 10.2 innings last season.

“We are very excited about what we are going to be able to do on the mound this year,” Monhollen said.

Hall, Johnson, Sasser and Brackett combined for strikeouts.

“(They) have all been in high-pressure situations before and I think are all poised to have a really good senior year on the bump with the guidance they’ve been getting from Coach (Chris) Jones throughout our bullpen work,” Monhollen said.

Hall tossed 51.1 innings last season, striking out 36 batters and posting a team-best 4.36 ERA.

“Ryan was already our go-to guy as a junior. To be able to have someone who’s been in that role before coming back for another year is huge in terms of the poise and confidence that he can have from the mound as well as the

confidence the team can have in him and these other senior pitchers any time they step up to the hill,” Monhollen added.

Behind the plate is another experienced Chief.

Brackett caught 74 innings last season behind then-senior Ashton Stamey. Brackett has been competing to be the catcher for Sequoyah since his freshman season, battling the depth the team had at that position.

In his time with the pads and mask on, Brackett caught three runners stealing while allowing only seven passed balls.

“(He has) developed as a great all-around baseball player. We can put him almost anywhere on the field and feel confident that he is going to take care of any ball hit to that position and know his responsibilities there,” Monhollen said. “Luke is going to be our anchor behind the plate this year and is going to do an incredible job there.”

As a pitching option, the next catcher for Sequoyah will have the chance to develop while Brackett is on the mound.

## A well-rounded group

The sickness and weather have kept teams from practicing and that effect has Sequoyah short of knowing how the infield may look. The team is versatile with several of the pitchers forming options.

Johnson has covered third base in the past with Sasser at first. Veteran shortstop Josh Britton has graduated, leaving the position open for a player like Maddox Jones who stood out in place of an injured Britton last fall.

“Maddox Jones did a great job at the end of last year filling in for Josh Britton at shortstop after his injury. He’s incredibly athletic and we are excited to see him be able to put that on display as our shortstop this year,” Monhollen said.

Jones has also played at second base in the past. Hall is another

**SEE SEQUOYAH BASEBALL, 29**

# *With a chip on its shoulder, Tellico is set to move forward in 2025*



Tellico Plains has something to prove this fall.

After a disappointing 2024, Bears baseball is hoping to turn the tide in the new season and show that last season is behind them.

The Tellico roster is young, but the team has players eager to get on the field and compete. The Bears expect to rely on underclassmen in situations while also turning to a set of 10 upperclassmen who do not all bring baseball experience but know how to compete and put work in.

“We just tried to have this mindset, going back into the summer and the boys have done a wonderful job sticking to this, but we want to compete every day,” Tellico Plains coach Chris Hollinghead said.

Tellico looks to do the little things right — the first step forward as Hollinghead begins his second stint as Bears’ coach.

“They have been really business-like. They are young overall,

but we have a lot of maturity and they come to work every day,” Hollinghead added. “There is no goofing around. They know they want to do some rumbling and make a statement so they work on getting better every day.”

The group has shown a strong baseball IQ though. The team knows the task at hand and they have been identifying the areas to improve.

“I have been overall pleased with the character of the boys on this team. They want to get better and want to work — that is a coach’s dream,” Hollinghead said.

#### **New face, new ace**

One spot that will look different for Tellico is on the mound. The Bears graduate 55.1 innings combined between Peyton Dodson and Kyle Duckworth, leaving a spot open for several pitchers.

Roper Gudger went the most innings of returners, tossing 10.2 frames. He is working through a minor injury that has affected his preseason.

Freshman John Broad can make an immediate impact. He brings experience from his travel team along with other programs. Tellico expects to look at him heavily.

“He is going to be one heck of a baseball player for his four years here at Tellico. I am excited about his potential,” Hollinghead said. “He is a hard-working kid and knows the game. He is going to have to carry the load on the mound this year.”

Caden Kirkland is a left-handed sophomore option to take on a role, that Tellico hoped to get up to speed in February scrimmages.

“He has a little nastiness to his pitch. His confidence is growing and I am looking forward to what he does,” Hollinghead said.

Wearing many hats will be senior captain Darren McJunkin, one of those spots will be on the mound when called upon.

“Darren is by far the leader on this team. He is vocal on the field and a mature kid. He knows the game and he knows the situation,”

Hollinghead added. “Darren will be an integral part in helping our younger players adapt to the high school game.”

Still standing out on the hardwood is Rylan Woods — one of several baseball Bears with the basketball team. When he does eventually return to the diamond, Hollinghead hopes that the junior can grow into a Monday starter after missing his sophomore season.

“He throws a heavy ball and is an athlete. His arm is strong and he will be a good pitcher for us,” Hollinghead added.

#### **Falling into spots**

Behind the plate will be a familiar name with Dawson Edwards. The junior caught 73 innings as a sophomore and has gotten stronger in the offseason.

“He is just a player you love to coach. He is a hard worker and he wants to get better,” Hollinghead said. “He is going to be our quar-

# Softball Lady Chargers poised to build on last season



Coming off a season in which it recorded the most wins in seven years, McMinn Central softball is poised to build on that improvement with nearly everyone back for 2025.

Only one senior, Skylan Wilson, graduated off last year's team, whose 7-11 record represented more wins than the previous five years combined, compared to nine returning starters and 13 total players.

And that has head coach

Britt Shaw believing the Lady Chargers can make headway in a District 3-2A that includes powerhouses Meigs County and Kingston as well as programs at Tellico Plains and Sweetwater that have been largely successful the past decade.

"We have pretty much our entire team returning this year," Shaw said. "I expect to have a successful season in a very difficult district."

Lauren Peterson, a senior, is back after being the Lady

Chargers' leading pitcher as well as being the second-leading hitter. Jayme Tiberio, also a senior, was third on the team in hitting last year. Mirra Freeman, a junior, was the team's leader in batting average last season, and junior Lily Graves also made a significant impact. And after an impact freshman season, sophomore Kara Duckett is also poised for a strong 2025 showing both at the plate and backing up Peterson in the pitcher's

circle.

Central started the season 1-1, losing to Sequoyah 9-1 in the season opener before bouncing back with an 11-5 win over Loudon the next day.

Rounding out the Lady Chargers' roster are seniors Maddy Hicks, Jaxyn Hawn and Josie Grueber; junior Madelynn Kile; sophomores Amanda Burgin, Rae Stiner, Riley Thompson and Brooke Martin; and freshmen Kyndal Martin, Ally Johnson and Malia Markwell.

# Softball Lady Tigers have shoes to fill for 2025



Meigs County softball may be figuring things out as the 2025 season goes along.

Coming off a stellar 2024 in which they compiled a 31-4 record, a sweep of the District 3-2A and Region 2-2A championships and a fourth-place TSSAA state tournament finish, the Lady Tigers have some major shoes to fill after the offseason losses.

Those losses are most notable in the pitching circle, with all three top pitchers from last year gone. Lainey Fitzgerald, now at Tennessee Tech, rang up 220 strikeouts and a 1.50 ERA her senior campaign before graduating. Sierra Howard, the Lady Tigers' reliable No. 2 pitcher last year who threw their sectional game to get to Murfreesboro, is also graduated and now at Cleveland State. Moreover, Sadie Scott, who was the Lady Tigers' heir apparent in the circle after an

impressive freshman campaign, transferred during the offseason to district rival Sweetwater.

But head coach Jeff Davis likes the hard work he sees from Meigs' new pitching staff. Elizabeth Miller, a sophomore who saw some innings in the circle as a freshman last year, will be the opening day starter. Lainy Goforth, also a sophomore, and junior transfer Cheyenne Snyder will also be in the mix.

"Looking for our young pitching staff to get stronger as the season progresses," Davis said. "Elizabeth, Cheyenne and Lainy are working hard."

Another notable loss on the offensive side of things is Kylee Hitson, who led the Lady Tigers in home runs last year with 12 and is now graduated and at Roane State. In all, Meigs lost five seniors to graduation.

But six starters and 12 play-

ers in all are also returning for the Lady Tigers, including a still solid proportion of last year's offense. Leading the way there is senior catcher Madylin Johnson, a Chattanooga State commit, who brings back last year's .396 batting average, 11 doubles, one triple, two home runs and 26 RBIs.

Alexis Kazy, a junior, is also back after a sophomore breakout

that included a .382 batting average, six doubles, seven home runs and 40 RBIs. Annslee Maddron, also a junior, brings back a batting average of .308 with three doubles and five RBIs. Sophomore Kennedy Smith will also be key after her freshman season batting .318 with three doubles, three

**SEE MEIGS SOFTBALL, 26**



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# *Sweetwater looks to find right mix in new season with deeper roster*



Sweetwater has something that has not been around the team for the past couple of seasons — a long list of experienced seniors.

With a group of players who have been on the field for most of the past three seasons, mixed with younger names that have proven themselves in the past and a transfer, the Lady Wildcats are eager to make an impact this spring.

Of the seven seniors on the roster, five of them have been with the team for their three previous seasons.

“They are bringing some maturity with them this year. It makes it a little bit easier because they lead the way for the younger ones and they know what to expect with the way I want things,” Sweetwater coach Sarah Davies said. “It has been nice having that maturity amongst that now.”

**Stepping into the circle**  
Sweetwater will have a hole

to fill at the pitcher spot, but the Lady Wildcats do have a pair of options.

Ella Morgan graduated with 89 innings tossed last season, leaving behind a role that will need someone to step into.

Sweetwater turns towards a pair of sophomores for that role. Transfer Sadie Scott comes in from Meigs County.

As a Lady Tiger, Scott tossed 48 innings, allowing 25 hits and three earned runs and struck out 80 batters.

Per the stats available, Scott finished with a .438 ERA while pitching three or more innings in eight games.

“We saw her in the playdate this past weekend and she can bring it. We are really excited for what she can do,” Davies said. “We are still going to lean on Lilly (Woodruff) a lot, but that is going to lighten Lilly’s load and let her be able to fill a role wher-

**SEE SWEETWATER SB, 30**

**Good Luck to All Area Teams!**

As another exciting spring season kicks off, we'd like to wish all the area teams good luck and much success.

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# Sequoyah faces new year with talent, holes to fill



It will be around three weeks until Sequoyah plays a softball game in Madisonville, but the Lady Chiefs hope to be in the zone when the April 2 game with Sweetwater rolls around.

Until then, it is 10 away games to start the season.

Sequoyah struggles to get home games in during March due to the amount of water that stays on the field. The payoff brings a majority of home games in April as the team hits its stride.

“Sometimes I think we play better when we are on the road. I feel like it does not really affect us,” head coach Allen Roberts said. “Because of Spring Break being right there at the end of March — for those first couple of weeks — we are out playing and then get a little bit of a break.

“I just feel like when we are playing, we are in good shape.”

While the start of the season may be unfamiliar, one thing that is consistent will be the amount of talent on the field.

Sequoyah returns plenty of talented batters alongside experienced defenders. The team does have heavy holes to fill in both spots, but the Lady Chiefs are poised to handle the gaps and compete in 2025.

#### Welcome back, Ace

Returning to the pitcher’s circle for Sequoyah will be Kaleigh Atchley. The junior missed the end of last season after having a tremendous 2024.

She returns to the Lady Chiefs’ lineup and has looked solid in limited outings, after tossing 71 innings with 103 strikeouts and a

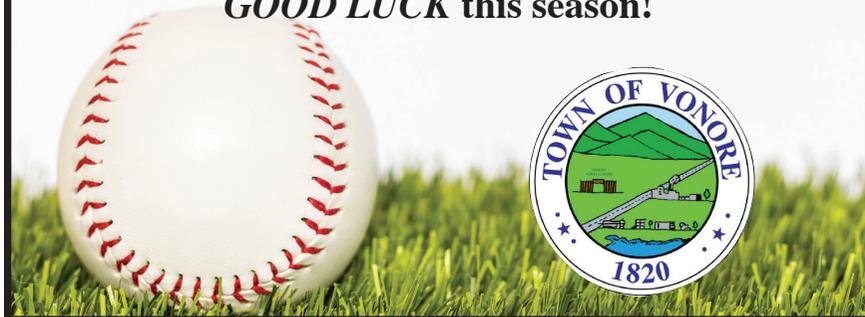
2.47 ERA in 2024.

“Having her back will definitely be a big help to us in the circle,” Roberts said. “She looked good. Because of the weather and sickness, practices have been really limited.

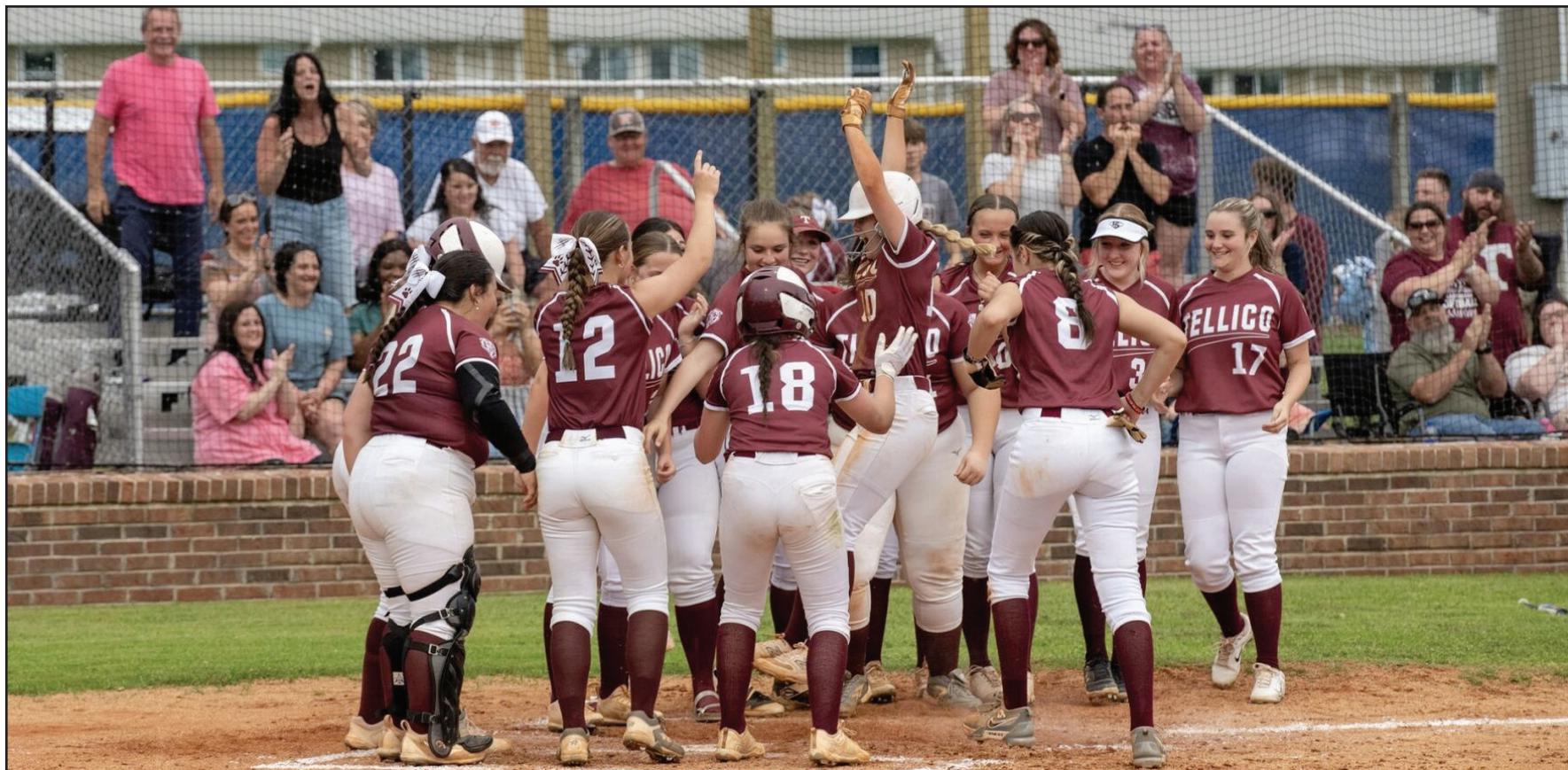
“We have missed so much school and everything (in February). But she has looked good as far as it being this early in the year.”

**SEE SEQUOYAH SOFTBALL, 31**

**The Mayor, Vice Mayor, Alderman and all Staff of  
The Town of Vonore want to wish all area teams  
GOOD LUCK this season!**



# Loaded with depth, Tellico aims to new heights in new year



The names across the field in Tellico Plains will be familiar.

The Lady Bears return all but one graduated player from the 2024 team that won 17 games and reached a District 3-2A semifinals.

With plenty of experience and depth in every position, Tellico is hopeful to build on a year ago and take the program past the district tournament for the first time since 2021.

“I think our expectations are a little higher. We are a little older, but we are still not loaded in seniors,” Tellico Plains coach Don Swanson said. “I think maturity-wise from last year to this year is going to make a big difference in the things we do. We are still almost two people deep in a lot of positions and that is only going to make us better.”

## Circle Up

Tellico adds to the pitching group with Skyler Day, who missed most of last season with an injury. She is joined by Kadence Moses who carried a heavy load in 2024.

Moses tossed 101.1 innings last season with 139 strikeouts and posted a 2.90 ERA.

Day pitched only 12 innings before getting hurt last season. In that period, she sat down 12 batters and posted a 3.50 ERA.

“She is a very good athlete and has good speed on her fastball and good change-ups,” Swanson said. “We are going to have two really good pitchers.”

Day is finishing shaking her rust off, but will help lead the Lady Bears in the new season.

Tellico does have a third option

on the mound in Meredith Linder. The junior pitched 44.2 innings last season and is capable of being a No. 3 on the mound when the moment calls, but she is expected to see the field more.

“She is more content just playing the field if she has to. She will

pitch if I call on her, but she is really not concerned about pitching,” Swanson added.

Behind the plate is another group of experienced players. Kalli Yates-Matoy and Jagger

**SEE TELLICO SOFTBALL, 33**



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# Softball Lady Cherokees navigate tough road for 2025



With seven seniors lost from last year's 9-19 season, first-year head coach Jesse Mizell Anderson has one simple goal for the 2025 McMinn County softball team: beat last season's record.

Those losses to graduation include two current college players: Lexi Cooley, now at UT-Chattanooga, and Cami Wade, now at Cleveland State. The only two starters back from last year are senior Madison Herd and junior Macy Bobich.

And the Lady

Cherokees' schedule, even outside of a daunting District 5-4A that includes one state tournament team from last year (Walker Valley), includes many programs that have had significant recent success, including Meigs County, Kingston, Heritage, Sequoyah and Soddy-Daisy.

"We have a tough schedule this season, but I look for my players to rise to the challenge and compete well," said Anderson, who is a former standout catcher for McMinn. "This team took

a hit by losing so many seniors last year, but we have had several girls step up and work hard to fill in some key roles."

Bobich already got her season off to a strong start in the Lady Cherokees' opener against Ooltewah, turning two double plays from her shortstop position while banging three hits.

Aside from Herd and Bobich, seven other players are returning: juniors Arlea Jones, Brooklyn Barnett, Bailey Derrick and Libby Jennings

and sophomores Lillie White, Trinity Riedel and Ziomara Limon.

Riedel and White in particular are players Anderson believes can make an impact.

"Trinity Riedel and Lillie White are only just sophomores, but we look for them to contribute to our infield with Riedel at third and White alternating between pitching, catching, and first base," Anderson said.

Another senior, Lotte Jacobs, and another sophomore, Leanne Watson, are newcomers,

and they are joined by four freshmen: Addie Miller, Addie Rountree, Blair Prince and Hayden Potter.

Of those freshmen, Miller showed some promise in the pre-season, having hit two home runs in a scrimmage just before the Lady Tribe's season opener.

"We are a young team with a mountain of a season to climb, but I wouldn't want to take it on with any other combination of girls than the 15 that I've got," Anderson said.

# With stronger preseason, Sweetwater looks forward to riding tide into 2025

Sweetwater soccer is looking to build upon a solid 2024 season.

The Wildcats finished as District 4-A runners-up and reached the Region 2-A Championship a year ago.

With more time to adapt to the new system, and a competitive freshmen class joining the mix, Sweetwater hopes to stretch beyond the feat of the 2024 season.

“With the seniors that left last year and the younger players we had, it was a very solid team. Unfortunately, it was just one year that I coached them,” Sweetwater coach Ricardo Torres said. “Most of the seniors from last year, I have never watched them play soccer before last year.”

Torres took over the team at the last minute a year ago, stepping in

about a week ahead of the start of the season.

“I think it was a good year for the program to feel more confident in what we are doing and feel more solid with the younger players,” Torres added. “I think, having the result that we did last year, (has motivated everyone).”

The team has been conditioning for over a month and getting in what time on the field they have been allowed. In the short preseason the group has had, positivity is flying around the program.

“That is a sign that last year was a good starting point for us to continue with the program,” Torres said.

One of the biggest differences this year is a full preseason under Torres.

**SEE SWEETWATER SOCCER, 33**



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**JANUARY 9, 2025**

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**FEBRUARY 22, 2025**

Decades Concert

**MARCH 15, 2025**

17th Annual Benefit  
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**JULY 4, 2025**

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# Sequoyah eager to take shape with new season

Sequoyah is focused on building the program forward in 2025.

A delayed start from weather and a coaching vacancy have left the team with the opportunity to make discoveries about its personnel and duties on the field, but the team has been seeing over 20 players through conditioning and February practices.

While the final destination for the Chiefs may not be clear, the eagerness to unlock the potential is palpable amongst the group.

“We just want to have a good, productive season and get better with each game and each day — set small obtainable goals,” Sequoyah coach Justin Miller said. “Learn how to play together, learn how to play as a unit and get better every day with each practice and each day.”

Due to issues with the weather, Sequoyah was not fully able to start working until Feb. 24 when the team fielded two teams for a full scrimmage.

Much of the early season will be spent seeing how certain players adapt and fall into spots in the field. Miller spoke about getting a better grasp on positional awareness and familiarity with teammates.

“I see some bright spots and I see some things that need to be fixed,” Miller said. “As far as talent, I think we have a pretty good stable of talent, so I am looking forward to that.”

Sequoyah brings speed to the season, hoping to find chances to move the ball quickly off the wings and funnel into the space behind the opposition’s defense.

“We have some good shooters and we have some speed,” Miller said. “It is kind of about putting that together and getting a good defensive line set up.”

As the season starts, Sequoyah will look to see how players complement each other and who can excel in funneling the ball into space.

The roster is mixed with returning players as well as several



Chiefs who did not play in the previous seasons.

“We have some good returning talent from the previous couple of years. To be honest with you, that is pretty much all I know about them right now,” Miller said. “With the weather and my athletic director duties, we are still in the getting-to-know-you phase.”

Sequoyah will look to improve on the 29 goals scored in 2024.

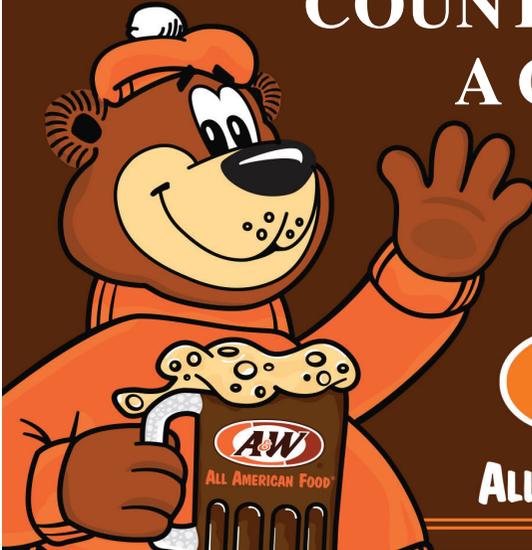
“We tended to waste a lot of opportunities in the past, so I’m wanting them to take better shots and take care of the ball in the midfield,” Miller added. “Protect the ball and make better passes. I want them to communicate better, which I think making better passes comes with.”

“That is really as far as I have gotten as far as any kind of game-plan right now.”

Danilo Camacho will be a returning face in the net. He brings experience to the Sequoyah goal.

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# Tellico aims to continue building program in 2025

Tellico Plains is looking to continue the growth of soccer this season.

The program has set goals heading into the spring and, with a more experienced and deeper roster, the Bears are keen on hitting those targets.

Tellico boasts seven returning players to the 2025 roster. With the added foundation that was begging to be laid last season, this group will be key in the Bears continuing to press forward.

“For this area, it is a huge difference. They are good kids and are willing to help the upcoming ones,” Tellico Plains coach Martin Calvillo said. “Without them, we probably would not stand a chance of winning a game.”

That group mixes with several new faces — adding to Tellico’s goal of progressing forward.

One of those first tangible goals will be doubling the amount of wins from 2024. Still a program trying to find its footing and create something, Tellico won two games last year.

The staff is expecting key roles from the returning players, something that the program has not had much of in the past — in terms of the amount of returning players.

“The strengths will definitely be last year’s players helping the new ones. That will definitely be our strength, to come together,” Calvillo added. “With the players we have gotten this year, hopefully, if we can keep the group together, the sport is looking good for Tellico.”

One thing that has been a challenge for the Bears — across much of East Tennessee as well — is getting on the field. School closures for illness and weather have slowed down the opportunities.

“We have not had as much practice as we should. But they are coming together really good and the returning guys are helping the new players learn how to play,” Calvillo said. “I think we will have a really good team.”

Tellico plans to begin the season running a 4-4-2, one of the most common formations in soccer and one that offers support to each line on the field.

Calvillo did express an interest in exploring formations once the season begins.

However, several spots on the field are still up for grabs as Tellico looks to get things going.

“It all depends on work ethic and (how we practice). I told the team we have a good group right now and I am really hoping they start growing up mentally. Most of them are young adults and they are starting to be responsible for whatever they want to do in life,” Calvillo said. “I told them, if they come to practice every day and bust their butts coming into work, they are going to play. I don’t have any stars in my team and I am going to keep it that way.”

Tellico aims at building accountability in the group and a competitive mentality each day.

Starting in goal will be junior Caden Payne. Tellico also has an option in Jake Best between the sticks.

Returning senior Chance Shapiro will start in the middle of the defensive line. Shapiro, who played a terrific football season in the fall, is no stranger to the physicality and competitiveness needed to be a center back.

Peyton McNabb has also shown well in defense, but the senior had a minor injury late in the preseason.

Shapiro could partner with Kal El Lingerfelt on defense. Myles Keener is also capable of taking a center-back position.

Junior Shane McNabb is an option at right back while Peyton McNabb and Carch Moser have competed on the left side.

The midfield four for Tellico could feature Best on the right side with Nolan Yearwood opposite of him on the left.

The center midfield pairing will be young with freshman



Drake Reynolds and sophomore Tydus Veal.

Up front, Tellico turns to junior Clint Moser to pair with sophomore Julian Celentano.

The Bears will also see con-

tributions across the field from Laken Woods.

Tellico competes in District 3-A with Brainerd, CSLA, McMinn Central, Polk County, Sweetwater and Tyner Academy.

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# McMinn soccer rebuilding to begin Andy Bailey era



New head coach Andy Bailey has no illusions about the task awaiting McMinn County soccer for 2025.

With only four returning starters off a team that finished 2024 with a 5-10-1 record, the Cherokeees are in rebuilding mode, and Bailey's immediate aim for the Tribe is to see improvement game to game.

"This is a rebuilding year for the Cherokeees with several new players and underclassmen," Bailey said. "The team is learning a new playing style and are constantly developing technical skills to improve individual performances. We are looking to steadily improve as team from each match played."

The few returning experienced players McMinn has will be key for success this spring, including junior Michael Kraskouskas at forward, juniors Bricen Webb and Koby Cook in the midfield, senior Gideon Upton at fullback and junior Denney McPhail at goalkeeper.

It is a team that will have plenty of room for growth both this season and future seasons, as

there are only four seniors: Upton, Deante Boe, Jaxon Lamb and Jarvon Merkerson.

The remaining juniors of a nine-member class are Josh Lockmiller, Jaime Castellanos, Jake Garcia, Josh Webb and Albert Banegas.

There are also nine sophomores: Alex Humbert, Brendan Johnson, Barry Livingston, Elias Zavala, Jonathan Mature, Luis Valenzuela, Matthew Lockmiller, Jonathan Hernandez and Eli Dake. Rounding out the roster are three freshmen: Diego Chaman, Mioses Barajas and Derickson Saucedo.

The Cherokeees began their season with three games in the Cleveland Classic against Silverdale, Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts (CSLA) and Kingston and their first home game Tuesday against Collegedale Academy. McMinn resumes action after spring break March 25 at home against Bradley Central. The Cherokeees then open District 5-AAA play March 27 against a Walker Valley team that reached the state tournament last year.

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# Central soccer seeks more success despite graduations



McMinn Central soccer is coming off a breakout 2024 season, but has some departures from that team to make up for this spring.

Last year's 9-6-2 record represents the Chargers' highest number of wins since the 2000s decade, and it also included the

first postseason win since the 2018 region tournament team. Central finished the regular season last year third place in the district standings and reached the district tournament semifinals.

But nine seniors graduated from the 2024 team, most notably

leading scorer Daxton Mayfield. Only five starters from last year and seven players overall return.

However, one of the returning players is senior Nick Jay in goal. Jay is District 3-A's reigning Goalkeeper of the Year and a Tennessee

Wesleyan commit.

On the offensive side of things, Damian Jaimes, Quinton Grueber and William Mayfield will be counted on to step up, according to head coach Emily Plaster.

Rounding out the Chargers' roster are Maddox Chrisman,

Aiden Rodriguez, Alex Martinez, Shawn Acome, Angel Mercado, Jordin Freeburn, Collin Acome, Bradley Mayfield, Dylan Carroll, Liam Mason and Irvyn De'Luna.

Central begins its season 7 p.m. March 13 at home against Bledsoe County.



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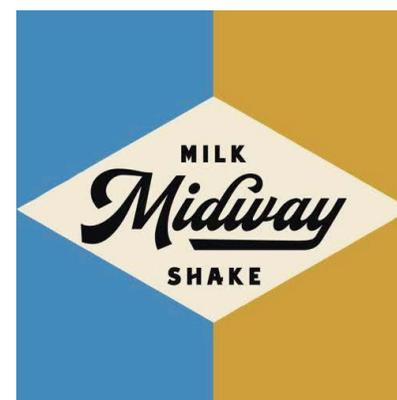
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# Sequoyah heads into season with talented athletes

Heading into a new season, Sequoyah rosters a large team filled with talented athletes aimed at setting and exceeding its goals in the 2025 track and field season.

“We have done a lot of prep on learning new forms. We are a larger team than we have been in the past, so a lot of the kids are new to the sport,” head coach Nathanael Schrimsher said. “I am seeing a whole lot of talent. We have a lot of kids who I am sure are going to be very good at their events and I am really excited about that.”

To start the season, Sequoyah set the qualifying times for the regional competition, giving the athletes clear goals to work towards across the season.

“That is our goal. We want to set our sights high and go for the thing we can do first,” Schrimsher said. “Once we obtain that, we are going to start looking at some state-level times that we might be able to upgrade from.”

Much of the sport is built on individual motivation with athletes striving to set their own goals and records across the season.

“That stuff is just as important,” Schrimsher said.

The weather has limited all teams in the area through the preseason, but Sequoyah seems poised as March and the season rolls in.

“Our weather has definitely not helped with practices. But it looks like the whole team is healthy and we are getting pretty close to having 100% from everybody,” Schrimsher said. “The kids have seemed super excited and very engaged. They are wanting to do this and they are very engaged.”

As the season begins, the Chiefs will start to transition more into focusing on individual events and perfecting form after heavy conditioning and training in February.

“We are going to be a lot more focused on specific events. A lot of our early season stuff is getting in shape and conditioning,” Schrimsher said. “As we get into



the season, you are going to know your events and you are going to practice specifically for what events you are in.”

On event days, Schrimsher and the team focus on finding the right mental place for competition.

“Right now, we are working really hard on getting our mental state correct. Mental state is a big deal in track,” Schrimsher said. “You have to play the right mind game first and have yourself in the right head space and be confident. We don’t want to be overconfident, but we want to be confident in ourselves.”

“As long as the form is correct and we start our events right, then speed, distance and all of that will come.”

Sequoyah competed at Loudon on March 4 and South-Doyle on March 11. They will also compete

at events in McMinn County and Lenoir City.

On April 18 and 19, the Chiefs will compete at the Vol Classic in Knoxville. Division I Sectionals are set for May 14.

Athletes can vary in events and competitions as the season goes on, but the Chiefs are looking to start with a heavy number of athletes in running events.

Standout Logan Lee and Michael Hopkey will compete in the 110 boys hurdles with Caleb Swabe, Quinten Peery, Colton Nance and Dusty Tinsley in the 100m dash, who will also run in the 4x100m.

Sequoyah could have two teams in the 4x200m, starting with Christian Tallent, Rylee Black, Kaden McKeown and Tanner Parcher. Caden Atkins, Owen Reed, Wyatt Hankins and Lake

Green will also compete.

Sequoyah will have several runners in the 1600m boys event with John Binondo, Caden Stallcup, Coy Green, Isaiah Spurling and Marshall Grant.

Standouts Emily Hunt and Annie Rogers will compete in the 100 hurdles with Hunt joining Haven Kaylor and Maddie Kent in the 100m dash.

Breilyn Wagner and Anna Williams will be joined by Kaylor and Rogers in the 4x200 relay.

Long-distance runners for the girls feature Rylee Davis, Maliyah Crowder, Savannah Hagood and Savannah Kirkland in the 1600m.

Sequoyah will form two teams in the 4x100m, starting with Kaylor, Williams, Hunt and Kali Compton.

The other team will feature Hagood, Wagner, Kent and Rogers.

# McMinn track a mix of state contenders, promising youth



McMinn County track and field returns one state meet participant and another aiming for his first trip to Murfreesboro, while introducing a lot of youth with high expectations for the future.

“Overall, we’re looking for better things to come down the road, but right now we’re just young and the weather has impeded us from getting outside and conditioning,” said McMinn head coach Tony Murdic. “So we’re a little behind in conditioning. But we are working toward it, and we are just trying to get better and

better.”

Clark Nation, a junior who set the school mark in the triple jump on his way to the Spring Fling last year, is poised for more success, having jumped 38 feet, 0.25 inches in a preseason jamboree at Farragut.

At that same jamboree, junior Jakyran Dyer ran the boys’ 100-meter dash in 11.74 seconds. Dyer finished fifth in last year’s sectional meet in that event, 0.09 seconds away from qualifying for state himself, and is now aiming to get over that barrier. Daviana Orr, a junior,

could be headed for a breakout in throws this season, according to Murdic. Orr threw the discus 65 feet, 3 inches at the Farragut jamboree, which was eighth in the girls’ field there.

Then there are some freshmen whom Murdic believes can make an impact this spring. Lennon Solsbee, a freshman who is coming off a state cross country meet this fall, is looking to emerge in the boys’ distance runs.

On the girls’ side, freshmen Kaylie and Katie Crockett and Aubree Marbury could make noise

in the sprints.

Murdic had a better idea of where the team stood after it began its season officially March 6 at Ooltewah. McMinn continues the season with its home meet March 14.

Rounding out the girls’ team are seniors Calandra Perkins, Syncere Standridge and Trinity Whitfield; juniors Kataruh Mills and Gracie Wattenbarger; sophomores Mina Kurowski and Ashton McDermott; and freshmen Lacey Barber, Elisa Hernandez, Princess Mitchell and Emmarie Raper.

Rounding out the boys are seniors Shamus Crayne, Cayden Cromer, Landon Hayes, Jacob Sharp Jayden Sullivan and Taylon White; juniors Ace Cagle, Winston Coffey, Josiah Dyer, Christian Edwards, Cam Goforth, Nehemiah Jackson, Javonte Parker, Jackson Lyle, Jonah Martin, Makye McDermott, Aiden McDonald and AJ Orozco; sophomores Jesse Jones and Lincoln Watson; and freshmen Kaiden Brewster, Miles Hughes and James Ziegler.

Assistant coaches are Ryan Heming, Nancy Jones and Caleb Smith.

# Central track seeks more success despite graduations, injuries

McMinn Central track and field lost one multiple state champion and members of a school-record relay team to graduation, and a few expected athletes are out due to injury.

But one other multiple state champion remains and is poised for more, while other athletes look to step it up for 2025.

“We are thin in numbers, but the few that we have out there are dedicated and are working hard toward their own personal goals for this year,” said head coach Shannon Goodin.

Graduated is Maddox Mayfield, the two-time state champion in the girls’ 400-meter dash, who is now at Lee University. Gone along with her are Molly Masingale and Sadie Goodin, who along with Mayfield were members of a relay team that broke school records in the 4x100-meter, 4x200 and 4x400 events.

McCary Beaty, on the other hand, is back for her senior season in 2025. Beaty, a Western Carolina track signee, is coming off a junior season that she finished with a TSSAA state championship in the Class AA 300-meter hurdles, setting that event’s school record in the Spring Fling. Beaty previously won the state championship in long jump, still holding the school record distance in that event, as well.

The lone remaining member of last year’s girls’ relay teams, Beaty also has second- and third-place finishes in the state pentathlon on her resume – another thing she is looking to improve upon this spring.

Three more seniors from last year, who were core distance runners, are also graduated: Gracie Eisenhart, Jacob Fasig and Clint Bailey.

And in addition to the graduations, junior sprinter Jake Goodin and junior thrower Jeb



Goodin are still out with knee injuries from football, and senior thrower Amelia Mayfield out with her knee injury from basketball. Kaitlyn Rogers, a senior, sustained a concussion from wrestling but is expected to return during the season as a distance and mid-distance runner.

“Unfortunately, we have suffered several off season injuries from other sports that are going to have us down a little this season,” Goodin said.

But Central also has some athletes ready for a breakout, with sophomore Te’ojah Lowry looking to succeed Mayfield in the girls’ 200 and 400 dash events. Lowry was sixth in the 400 in the East Sectionals last year as a freshman, running 1:03.04 in that event.

“Te’ojah Lowry is a key sprinter

that is going to step in and push for some great timing results this season,” Goodin said. “We are looking forward to and are expecting big things from her.”

On the boys’ sprinting side, sophomore Jemiah Lenoir is aiming for his own breakthrough in the 200 and 400.

“Jemiah Lenoir is another quality sprinter that is coming into his own as a 200 and 400 sprinter,” Goodin said. “He improved his times tremendously from the beginning of the season last year and look for him to be a state qualifier this season.”

Goodin also expects senior Raymond McCarty, a football and basketball standout, to position himself for sectionals and possibly state in the boys’ long jump.

Camryn Loden, also a basket-

ball standout, is expected to lead the girls’ throwers as a senior, and juniors Landyn DeFriece and Landin McInturff the boys’ throwers.

Sophomores Eli Coggins and Keller Grueber are also both contenders for mid-distance appearances in the sectional and, what Goodin hopes, state.

Rounding out the track team are senior Jalen Irvin; juniors Bradley Mayfield, Sladyn Caldwell, Kali Miller and John Mazzei; sophomores Will Mayfield and William Pangle; and freshmen Millie Latham, Ava Nevins, Aiden Nevins and Mercedes Clay.

Central’s track season began Tuesday at South-Doyle and continues March 28 at Signal Mountain.

# Sweetwater brings talented, focused athletes to new track season



Sweetwater will enter this track season with 34 athletes eager to chase goals and set standards across the spring semester.

The target of the season varies. Some Wildcats are looking to return to the state championships, some Wildcats are seeking to break school records and some Wildcats aim at improving on their goals each day.

Whatever the goal is, each Wildcats' journey started in a rainy and cold February.

"Preseason mode we do a lot of learning how to get into the blocks and set them up. Once the season starts, we fine-tune those skills," Sweetwater coach Darla Cooper said. "They understand that once I say 'set, go' they have two seconds or less to get up and go.

"We work on handoffs and their distances — trying to build up lung capacity and endurance."

While parts of the preseason have been delayed by illness and weather, the athletes in

Sweetwater have been eager to put work in.

"They have been very motivated. It just has been kind of hard because we have been closed for the last two weeks of school (at the time of the interview)," Cooper said. "We have not been able to get out and practice these last two weeks like I really wanted to."

Sweetwater had a solid final week of February heading into the season as the Wildcats began to set their goals for the year.

"Each runner and thrower that I have, they try to beat their personal record every time we go to a meet," Cooper added.

### Around the track

Sweetwater has a plethora of running athletes, starting with McCade Frye, who competed at last year's Class A state championship.

Frye is currently the only long-distance male runner. He is off to a strong start, already setting a new school record in the

1600m at the Farragut Jamboree on March 1, breaking the time set in 2013.

Frye ran a 4:40.57 on Saturday — eight seconds off his time from the state meet.

Sweetwater features five long-distance runners on the girls' side.

Safiya Totino, an exchange student from Italy who transferred from Maryville over the winter, joins the team.

Also joining the team is Lydia Johnson, who is new to track. Lauren Lyon will also run.

Isabelle Croft, who competed in field events as well last year, is focusing solely on running events this season.

Emory Arwood is part of a team that hopes to set a record in the 4x800 relay after she shakes off a preseason injury.

Kasiah Gibson will have a strong season in the 100m. Also running will be Kamyah McBee and Isabella Hicks.

Sweetwater has several new athletes competing in the 100m on the boys' side. Elijah Johnson, Yael Medina, Cooper Rutzen and Dominic Yoemans will run.

Isaiah Stiles also joins the list. Parker Willett is capable of running in short and long distances for Sweetwater.

"We joke around and have a good time but, at the end of the day, they know what we are out there for and they have to work hard for it," Cooper said. "They really push themselves to be better than the day they were before."

Josiah McCosh aims to set a new school record in the 400m. The current record comes from Casey Ferguson's 51.9 in 1999.

The Wildcats aim to field a team to set a new record in the 4x100 relay. The current record is 46.04 set in 1992.

### Taking the field

Sweetwater does not roster as many throwers, but the group is

**SEE SWEETWATER TRACK, 27**

# Meigs tennis looking for new players to step up for 2025



All of the most familiar and accomplished faces from Meigs County tennis' success the past two years are graduated and gone.

Departed from 2024, the second straight season that the Tigers sent a contingent to the TSSAA state tournament, are boys' singles player Dez Smith and doubles team of Ethan and Easton Meadows, all three of whom were in Murfreesboro last spring. The Meadows cousins had made state

two straight years.

Also graduated is Macey Bunch, who was part of a state-bound girls' doubles team her junior season and a district champion and region runner-up in singles her senior season.

And with the graduations of Smith and the Meadows, the Meigs boys' team that has won two straight region championships and earned two sectional berths lost its top three players. However, the No. 4 and 5 players

on last year's region title team, Ethan Cross and Nate Powell, are both back for their senior season.

On the girls' side, senior Tynsley Peaden, junior Kenzie Brock and sophomore Gracie Garrett are the top returners from a Lady Tigers team that has been region runner-up the last two years.

Rounding out the girls' team are senior Maddie Newman; juniors Heart Calaycay, Meg Dearing and Brooke Plaster; and freshmen

Karmen Chase and Jaylen Lynn.

Rounding out the boys' team are seniors Isaiah Hernandez and Andrew Woodall; juniors Jacob Coleman, Jonah Isaza, Gabriel Ornelas, Dylan Stokes, Jacob Teehan and Johnathan Wade; and freshmen James Calaycay and Jacory Clowers.

Meigs' tennis season began March 4 at Rhea County and resumes March 20 against Rockwood at Roane State Community College.

# Experienced McMinn tennis teams eyeing deep postseason runs



With multiple top-six players back for both girls' and boys' teams, McMinn County tennis is expecting deep postseason runs for both.

McMinn's girls last year, despite having graduated the core of two straight state tournament teams, still finished second place in District 5-AA and had split matches with team district champion Walker Valley. The boys, meanwhile, are looking to improve on a third-place district finish.

"I'm always excited about spring tennis," said McMinn head coach Lynn Monroe. "New season, new players and great kids makes for a fun and encouraging spring. Cannot wait to see how we do this season."

Graduated from the girls' team

last year were the two remaining starters from their state tourney runs, Aubrey Gonzalez and Katie Elliott. As a doubles pair, Gonzalez and Elliott finished as the District 5-AA and Region 3-AA runner-up, one match short of the individual state tournament.

Returning for one more crack at an individual state appearance is senior Hanah Clark, the No. 1 girl for McMinn. Last year, Clark finished singles as the runner-up in district and region, with both of those losses coming to four-time state tournament participant Ensley Collins of Walker Valley. With Collins no longer an obstacle and with a year of offseason preparation, Clark is seeking to end her high school tennis career with a trip to

Murfreesboro.

And with four other starters returning as well – sophomore Mina Kurowski (sister of three-time state tournament participant Elena Kurowski) at No. 2, junior Madi Bean at No. 3, senior Madison McDonald at No. 5 and senior Kela Compton at No. 6 – McMinn's girls are eyeing a return to the top of the district as a team and beyond.

The boys return four starters, headlined by No. 1 player Andrew Brown, a junior. Brown reached the individual district semifinals last year as part of a doubles pair with the graduated Rylan Adams. Also returning from last year are sophomore Khade Parkinson at No. 3, junior Tucker Ladd at No. 5 and senior Trevor Currier at No. 6.

Monroe also expects two freshmen, Carter Tinsman and Drew Trapp, to make an impact with the boys' team this season.

Rounding out the girls' team are senior Marissa Tinsman; juniors Mia Sewell and Halle Newman; and freshmen Sophie Holmes, Karrington Dills, Stormy Breeden and Keely Kessler.

Rounding out the boys are seniors Caleb Bice and Hayden Weir; sophomores Jaxson Gonzalez and Fender Lawson; and freshmen Derek Ramey, Crosby Aziz and Cooper Howard.

McMinn began its season March 6 at home against East Hamilton and continues March 15 in the Fairfield Glades tournament, before resuming March 25 at home against Bradley Central.

# Central tennis seeks to build on last year's breakout



With a mix of experienced returners and promising newcomers, McMinn Central tennis seeks to build even further on last year's success for 2025.

"The team is looking to compete at a high level and make a strong push in district and region play," said Central head coach Katelyn Whitener.

And the girls' doubles team of senior Reagan Baker and sophomore Malea Masingale will be looking to take the next big step after finishing 2024 as the District 4-A champion and Region 2-2A runner-up, which was one match short of a berth in the TSSAA state tournament.

"Reagan and Malea will be key players in the lineup, bringing experience and consistency in both singles and doubles play," Whitener said.

Also back from last year is senior Bryson Riden, who was one half of Central's boys' doubles

district runner-up team along with the now-graduated Brayden Bystry. Riden will also be counted on for team leadership.

"Bryson Riden brings both skill and leadership to the court," Whitener said.

On the boys' side, returning players Caleb Bunch and Noah Warf, both juniors, will contribute depth and reliability.

"Their experience from past seasons will be crucial as they take on tough competition throughout the schedule," Whitener said.

Several new faces, many of whom were standouts in other sports, are also joining the boys' team, including seniors Carter Anderson and Ray McCarthy and juniors Landon Harris, Landin McInturff and Josiah Ritcheson.

On the girls' side, seniors Karina Bystry and Naomi Kennedy also return to provide a solid veteran core. They are

joined by newcomers including seniors Kaydann Bennard, Anna Carson and Arianna Wilson, sophomore Jacqueline McGuarry and freshman Lily Arwood.

"Their addition strengthens the team's depth and versatility, giving the lineup more options in both singles and doubles play," Whitener said.

Arwood, in particular, has dis-

played some promise leading up to the season.

"Lily has shown great potential during preseason training," Whitener said.

Central begins its tennis season March 25 at Loudon.

"As they step onto the court, the team is focused, determined, and eager to showcase their hard work," Whitener said.

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# Sweetwater Baseball

Continued from Page 5

is up in the air for late February. Returning senior Cade Houser, who caught 247 innings last season, is questionable with an injury.

If he cannot go, the Wildcats have a pair of options in sophomores who played heavily last season with Nolan Dacus and Brody Watson.

“They are two guys that will see time back there. Both of them have caught a lot in their career in terms of middle school and summer ball,” Watson added. “Those are the two guys we are going to get some work and see where it falls between them.”

Dacus is versatile as an option as a corner infielder or corner outfielder. Brody Watson played heavily at first base last season.

“We are hoping one of those guys takes the lead role there if Cade cannot come back and catch behind the plate,” Watson said.

The remainder of an infield varies on which arm is pitching. Tucker Lorenz’s graduation leaves a hole at shortstop that could be filled with Burgess, Richesin or Brown.

Richesin also has experience at third base. It is a puzzle that may solve itself as games go.

“Between the three, all three of them should help us on the mound, especially during the district games,” Watson added. “Depth right there has increased with the younger players. We will kind of see where the team needs them the most and how it is going to fit.

“If we get a few games under our belt and get through these scrimmages, we can see how everyone has developed strength-wise.”

Davies is a returning, experienced centerfielder. Richesin’s versatility makes him an option as well. Senior Lucas Rockholt can also see plenty of time covering the grass. Dacus is also an option.

There seems to always be a Correll in the Sweetwater lineup.

Freshman Kolt Correll could see time out there, as Watson noted he thinks it could be his best spot.

“Outfield, we have to get a little bit better out there this year hopefully. We should have more speed than we have had out there as well,” Watson said. “We will definitely be young in a lot of areas. We just

need to play and get the experience.”

Similar to 2024, the season will be defined by how quickly players adapt. And the weather and illness have done nothing but slow that goal down.

It also puts the seniors into an important leadership position. Even in crutches, Houser was in the dugout for scrimmages communicating with teammates.

“Helping them communicate and teach the game — bringing that experience. The less you have to coach the better, especially if you have an older group that can teach,” Watson said. “Sometimes your best coaches are your older guys and a lot of the times that is how we like to do it.”

Sweetwater totals four seniors, zero juniors, seven sophomores and seven freshmen.

“There are holes to fill out there and you are going to have to bring the freshmen in. They are going to get the opportunity just like the sophomores did last year,” Watson added.

## Take a swing at it

Sweetwater’s top three batting averages from 2024 have graduated and No. 4 is questionable, leaving spots in the lineup available.

Dacus, Burgess and Richesin will be key returning bats after all hitting near or over .300. The group combines for over 100 hits and 73 RBIs.

Brody Watson also returns a .277 average, 31 hits and 26 RBIs.

“The sophomores that had good years last year are going to have to play like juniors and seniors this year,” Watson said. “There is a really good chance that there will be a couple of freshmen in there that get an opportunity to play right away.”

Freshmen will have to mix into the lineup, one that Travis Watson notes may take some time to discover.

“We have to find the best nine that kind of fits and it could take a few games into the year to get everything where we need to be,” Watson added.

Sweetwater returns to District 3-2A, a league they have won the past two seasons. It will again feature McMinn Central, who reached the sectional round two seasons ago.

Kingston will return, joined by Meigs County, Polk County and Tellico Plains.

# Sequoyah Soccer

Continued from Page 15

Ahead of him will be another returner in defender Diego Contreras.

“He has been a pretty promising defensive player in the past,” Miller said. “The rest of them I am getting to know them.”

Sequoyah plans to operate out of a 4-4-2, a formation that offers support to each line on the field.

“With getting to know the personnel and the people I am working with, I think that will come a little later (in the week),” Miller added. “We are just going to try to keep it basic and easy. I think that is a pretty easy formation for them.”

Contreras and Camacho have helped to usher the program forward through the preseason. Sequoyah will also look to players like Abel Corona and Brian Vazquez.

“Danilo Camacho definitely has leadership potential. He is definitely a workhorse,” Miller said. “There are several options there to play with. We are looking forward to having a good season, seeing what these boys can do and just having fun.”

# Sweetwater Track

Continued from Page 22

focused on a strong spring.

Micah Wilkins has been a key in getting throwing events going this preseason. He will throw both the discus and shot put with hopes of breaking 115, and then Chris Francis’ 1994 record of 133 in discus.

Hayden Osborne is a returning thrower while Thomas Raby will start in the discus for the first time.

Several of Sweetwater’s track and field athletes are multi-sport athletes in the school.

“I think that is extremely important. It helps to keep athletes in shape and it gives them a more diverse background when it comes to sports,” Cooper said. “It helps you in both arenas — football helps track and track helps football. I have girls that play soccer and they do track in the spring. It helps them with their soccer skills in the fall.”

Event day for Cooper is frantic with her covering the site to work with several athletes.

“We talk before we get to a meet about how things run and what is to be expected. I am kind of like a bumblebee and I go around,” Cooper said. “Everyone is pretty independent, but I am like a bumblebee from event to event. I like to record my athletes as well and share it with the team.

“On a race day, I really stress how important it is to stretch and, in the relay teams, we talk about handoffs, focusing in on smooth communication and to stay focused.”

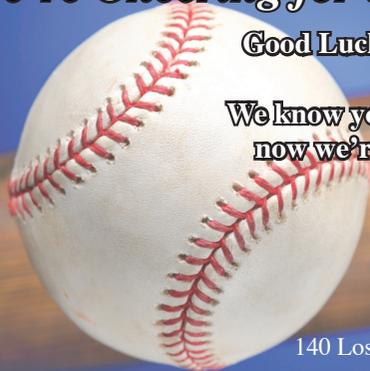
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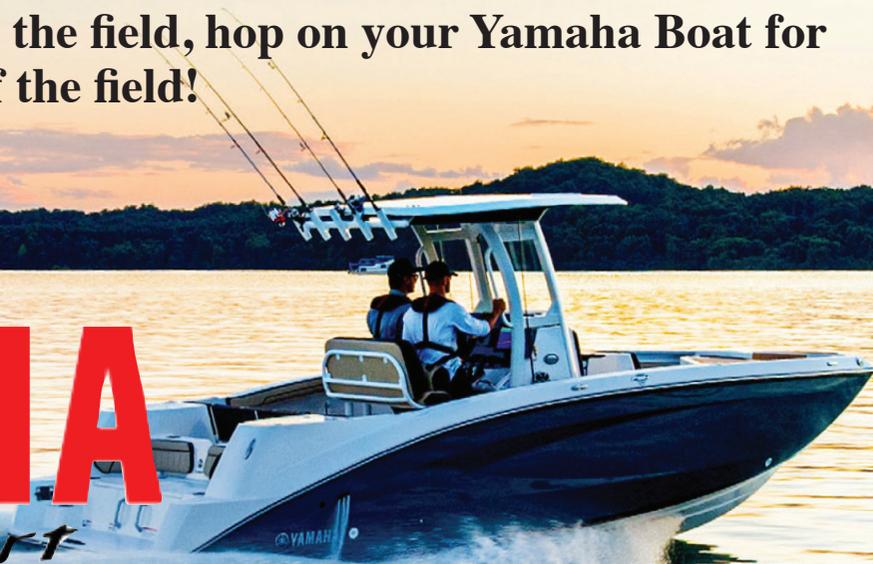
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# Sequoyah Baseball

Continued from Page 6

option at first base.

The puzzle needs solving in the early weeks, but the options are not short on experience.

Another experienced option will be Tipton, returning to centerfield.

“Tristan Tipton did a fantastic job transitioning from the field to outfield as a sophomore last year,” Monhollen said.

Tipton can be an anchor in the outfield with the corner spots still up for grabs.

“We tell our team that we are always wanting to peak at the end of the year, so we will be using not just these few days of practices but also the first part of our season to determine what our best lineup will be for when it counts,” Monhollen said.

## Finding the right swing

The Chiefs bring back strong hitters in Tipton, Johnson, Hall and Brackett who all hit over .300 in 2024. That group also combined for 101 hits and 62 RBIs.

However, after graduating the top two leadoff hitters, Sequoyah

will have spots to fill.

“The bulk of the top of our lineup graduated last year, but I am excited to see what this year’s team will be able to do as they take on different roles in the lineup,” Monhollen said. “There were several times last year that the coaches praised the bottom of our lineup for their run production to carry us through games. So far this year, this team seems to have a great grasp on the idea of a team approach to offense.”

As a team, Sequoyah batted .267 in 2024 with 192 hits, 114 RBIs and 158 runs scored. Six Chiefs return with an on-base percentage above .300.

“If we can keep selfishness out of the box this year, I think that we have an opportunity to do some really exciting things on the offensive side of the ballgame,” Monhollen added.

CH Thomas returns as an associate head coach to the Chiefs’ staff while Bryce Bowers and Jones also return with a large

effect on the pitching corps.

Robin Renner joined the program and has helped with player development in the offseason.

“I don’t think there’s a high school coach in Tennessee that can feel more blessed than I do to have these guys working together for our players,” Monhollen added. “Our goal for this season is to see everyone on our team end the year as a better baseball player than he is today and to see our team united while we develop a culture of scrappy, competitive players who are ready to give everything they’ve got in every opportunity they get to play this game.”

## Setting the culture

This Sequoyah team is not short on experienced players. After multiple seasons of contributing, the program has a large senior class that has paid their dues to the program.

“That transition between middle school and high school baseball is not for the faint of heart. Having a group of guys

who have had some time to get those rookie mistakes out of their system is a great asset,” Monhollen said.

With the experience added to this roster, the Chiefs will hope to find a way to find success in the new season and continue to put the program in the desired direction.

“It’s exciting for them as athletes too to know that they are going to be able to settle in and enjoy the game without all the nerves of someone jumping in who hasn’t been there before,” Monhollen added. “As a coach, I am incredibly grateful to have a group of seniors who are willing to serve their team as leaders by helping to teach the younger players without an us versus them mentality.”

The Chiefs will compete in District 5-3A, a league that features Heritage, Lenoir City, Loudon and South-Doyle playing in a format that sees 12 district games for all teams involved.

# Tellico Baseball

Continued from Page 7

terback behind the plate. His arm has gotten way stronger; he has really grown into himself this year and is really accurate from behind the plate.”

Freshman Gio Carter will play in relief of Edwards. Carter is a strong athlete who has developed and shown flashes.

“He is going to help us this year periodically behind the plate. But I hope he continues to grow and take on more of those duties,” Hollinghead added.

Two spots in the infield seem to be locked down — McJunkin at first base and Rylan Saffles at shortstop.

McJunkin has plenty of experience with Caden Kirkland and Cayden Smith in support.

Saffles could be an everyday shortstop for Tellico described as a “sophomore playing like a senior.”

“I really believe he is going to have a breakout year for us both at shortstop and at the plate,” Hollinghead said.

Second base presents an opportunity for several Bears. Broad will be a utility player when not pitching, sophomore Enrique Medina has worked hard and freshman Colt Cooper has shown well.

“It may be a carousel. Some of that is seeing who fits there the best and some of that is simply depending on who is on the mound,” Hollinghead said. “We really are young, but we are not your average young. This is not your typical freshman class — they are really good baseball-skill guys.

“I am excited about the next four years with this class.”

Broad and Will Sanders are options at third base.

Sanders brings varsity experience and boasts one of the highest bench presses on the team.

“He has worked really hard at cleaning up some fielding inconsistencies. He has really come on and worked at getting better and it is showing,” Hollinghead added.

## Moving forward

Two spots Tellico hopes to improve are the outfield and at the plate.

“It was the top of the list; we have to improve our outfield play — that is our No. 1 priority,” Hollinghead said.

For the coach, it starts with mentality and finding the right determination to impact the game.

“We have to be in our cleats and know what

**SEE TELLICO BASEBALL, 32**

# Sweetwater Softball

Continued from Page 10

ever we need her — she is a real utility player.”

Woodruff saw 63.1 innings as a freshman, striking out 51 batters and posting a 5.75 ERA.

“We are looking at both of them to contribute, but Sadie has been a huge contribution at the plate, on the mound and hitting-wise,” Davies noted.

## On the other end

While Sweetwater’s main arms will be younger players, the Lady Wildcats have a heavily-tested senior catcher.

Kylee Richeson caught 100 innings last season, allowing only three passed balls. Richeson has started for three seasons in Sweetwater and is poised for a strong final campaign.

“She has really come a long way,” Davies said.

Behind Richeson will be Chesney Isbill. A late start after finishing basketball season, Isbill will see some innings behind the plate in relief of Richeson, who caught the majority of the innings last season.

“I had not even seen some of these basketball kids in practice and they jumped right in on the play day,” Davies added. “We threw Chesney back there and that is going to ease Richeson.”

Richeson is an option to cover a hole at second base. The outfield is also on the table depending on how things trend behind the plate.

Sweetwater is still figuring out roles at first base as well. Madisyn Vestal played strong in a play date in February while Maddy Baylog has experience at first base, alongside third base and shortstop.

“We are kind of figuring that out,” Davies said. “We are working both of them and also looking at another freshman.”

Sarah Hutchison has the chance to make an impact in her rookie season. Woodruff can also

be versatile when not pitching.

## Something new in the air

Sweetwater expects the core infield to be built by Baylog, Hutchison, Vestal and Woodruff. Illness and the weather have kept the team from fully unlocking that solution, but the pieces are there.

“We could have a different look every game now that we have options now. We have talked about how that has been really pushing them to work hard in the weight room and offseason,” Davies said. “You look at our lineup two years ago, we would have 10 kids at the end of the year due to injuries.”

The added depth — the team now fields 17 players to start the season — has reinvigorated the Lady Wildcats.

“That is giving us good, quality options that we can move these kids around and they push each other to try to win those spots,” Davies said. “That has been a changing factor for us.”

That impact of competitiveness has not been lost in the offseason. The energy around the team has fully shifted.

“I think that is everything. It is not only giving us options in different looks and combinations, but it is driving each other,” Davies added. “They are not complacent, and this drives them to work harder. I can already see a difference.”

As a team, Sweetwater batted .273 last season with Woodruff and Vestal batting above .400. The next surge of averages comes from Tori Thompson at .289 and Richeson at .242.

“I can see a big difference between our seniors at the plate and our freshmen. There is a big jump between junior high ball and the high school,” Davies said. “I think our freshmen are going to make the jump soon, but it is going to take them a lit-

tle bit to do it.”

The seven seniors bring experience to the lineup, mixed along with Woodruff’s explosive bat.

“They are there and have made that jump already, so they are a little more confident at the plate,” Davies said. “We are going to lean on our returning seniors to lead this lineup. But we are also going to have a lot of speed.”

Woodruff led the team with 38 hits, two home runs, seven doubles and matched Thompson with 16 RBIs.

Thompson notched 24 hits, the second most of returners, and five triples. Vestal finished the year with 23 hits and 11 RBIs.

Based on the stats available, Scott did not see many at-bats as a freshman, but that could change in Sweetwater.

Scott is a versatile bat with a mix of power, slap bunting and speed.

“She is the real deal batting as well,” Davies added.

Freshman Baylee Bohrer can also make a spot for herself in the lineup with her speed.

“She is going to add trouble for any infield because she is going to be able to beat anything out,” Davies said. “She is coming around. Once she has a few more reps she will be a real factor.”

The Lady Wildcats finished with 195 hits last year, 43 of those for extra bases. Sweetwater will look to improve on that number with power bats in Thompson, Vestal, Baylog and Richeson.

“I think that confidence at the plate and not having those jitters that the others have is going to be a real factor,” Davies added.

Sweetwater does feel a tad behind, like many teams in East Tennessee after the illness and weather delays.

“I think we are about a week

and a half behind. We have not gone over a lot of the defensive things we have seen,” Davies said.

Several players went into the play day without any time on the field.

“I was not really having much of a clue what kind of spot the hitters needed to be in in the lineup,” Davies added. “I would have liked to go in with a little more knowledge, but we have a full week this week and we will be a little more ready for the next play day and day one.”

The start of the regular season may look makeshift for Sweetwater, but the focus is on how well the team looks in May.

“These kids are so athletic and so softball smart — so many of them play nearly year-round,” Davies added. “I think we will be ready and we will find that right combination. We may not find the right combination until we get to the district tournament.

“I am not worried about wins or losses, I am worried about the tournament and how far we go. I think we can make an impact in this district tournament.”

Sweetwater does have a couple of injuries that are affecting the preseason.

Kylie Baylog, who started at centerfield last spring, is working back from an injury in basketball season.

Andrea Jones, who played well as a freshman last year, is working back from a knee injury.

The team also adds six new faces in transfers and freshmen.

“It is going to be an interesting year. But, when this group were freshmen, we were really struggling their sophomore year and even last year,” Davies added. “We talked about getting to your senior year and making something happen that year, so we are really excited for this year.”

# Sequoyah Softball

Continued from Page 11

She will have support in Bella Hall, who handled most of the postseason a year ago. Hall saw 55.2 innings with 26 strikeouts.

Seniors TeAsya Cozart and Myserie Shubert also return as pitching options.

Finding the right spot

Looking to fill new spots in the infield, Sequoyah will have multiple familiar faces in varying spots.

Shae Ahlstrom and BriAysa Bowman both will see roles at catcher.

“We are probably going to split time with them until we look where we are going defensively. Both of those also play third base, so we can kind of interchange them,” Roberts said.

Bowman has caught in middle school and with her travel team while Ahlstrom covered the spot in JV as a sophomore last season.

“Breaking in a new catcher, which is an area that we have been strong in for several years. Just having those catchers being able to step up and lead us defensively is important to us,” Roberts said.

That duo will also cover third base for the Chiefs.

At shortstop, Tellico will be looking to replace a talented infielder in Tynleigh

Ray. Seniors Megan Ladd and Hall are both options to do the job.

“(Ladd) has played a lot of shortstop for us over the years. She and Bella have played a lot of shortstop for us over the years,” Roberts said.

Both join Atchley as options in center field.

“Those two can hold down that shortstop and center field positions and we will use both of them somewhat doing that,” Roberts added.

Hall is another option at second base, alongside Cozart. Hall finished 2024 with a .960 fielding percentage.

Both join the pitching corps as well.

At first base will be the returning Shubert. She posted a .976 fielding percentage as a junior with 35 putouts and only one error all year.

“She has quite a bit of experience over there and is a pretty seasoned first baseman,” Roberts added.

As a pitching option, Sequoyah can also turn to sophomore Kaisen Cansler at first base.

Centerfield has the trio of options in Atchley, Ladd and Hall. The corner outfielders will feature Maddie Koch in left field.

The junior played the spot in junior var-

sity last season.

“Maddie has improved quite a bit and I feel like Maddie is going to do a good job for us out there,” Roberts said.

Right field will see a rotation built of sophomores Faith Ferree, Lynley Kimble and Kadence Sutton.

“That will probably be a bit of a rotation until we settle on who we want to go with,” Roberts said.

## Swing away

Sequoyah batted .327 last year with 33 home runs, 170 runs scored and 225 hits, but graduated 23 home runs and three averages above .290.

However, the team still has experienced bats even with Ray, Alicia Kimble and Lilly Griffitts.

Atchley will resume her role as leadoff after hitting .343 as a sophomore with 24 hits and 11 RBIs.

“She gives us an experienced leadoff hitter and we really missed her come district tournament time,” Roberts said. “It will be nice bringing her back. She brings speed, is a good contact hitter and hits the ball hard.”

Atchley can get on base and move around the bags ahead of hitters like Ahlstrom and Shubert.

Ahlstrom batted .406 last season with 26 hits and 10 RBIs

while Shubert hit .389 with 28 hits and 19 RBIs.

Both tallied three home runs each.

“We are expecting some big things out of Shae and some power out of the left side,” Roberts said. “(Myserie) is a really good hitter and been one of our leading hitters the last two years.

“Offensively, we will depend quite a bit on her.”

Switch-hitter Bowman will be another tough at-bat in the new season.

“She can be a tough matchup at the

plate for pitchers. She has a real knack about getting on base and is a good baserunner,” Roberts said.

Sequoyah also has solid contact hitters in Hall and Ladd while Cansler and Kimble are options as potential designated players.

“Kasen and Lynley we both feel like are going to be pretty good hitters for us and they provided some power,” Roberts said.

Cozart also joins the list.

“We have quite a bit of experience through that group

of girls. To see the newer faces in that lineup is going to be girls like Maddie Koch, Lynley Kimble, Kadence Sutton and Faith Ferree,” Roberts added.

Sequoyah shares a similar struggle with programs across the area after being limited in practice through February.

“We have a lot of learning to do. I feel like we need to grow,” Roberts added. “There are a lot of big shoes to fill from last year. We lost some good defensive ball players and lost some real offense.”



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# Tellico Baseball

Continued from Page 29

is going on,” Hollinghead added. “I think just (being) athletes will be a key in improving our outfield.”

Cooper will feature in the outfield alongside another freshman in Cole Dodson.

The returning basketball players are also candidates.

Ike Hollinghead can feature at third base or the outfield as he works back from a serious knee injury.

“He naturally tracks a fly ball well and his momentum is always coming forward which is a big thing I preach,” Hollinghead said. “We have been preaching generating the momentum all you can, so you can get the ball back into our infielders as quick as possible.”

Hunter Russell returns to the team as an option, as does a versatile KT Hamilton — a tough-as-nails player who has excelled as a post for Tellico basketball.

“He is a big, strong, hard-nosed kid. He is one of those kids that you could plug into a lot of positions,” Hollinghead said. “He is one of those tough kids that, no matter what sport, he is going to work hard and do it well.”

Woods’ length makes him an option in the outfield as well. Senior Jonah Wilson also joins the list.

Tellico also wants to make strides in the batter’s box after hit-

ting .186 as a team last spring.

“The returning players have a little chip on their shoulders,” Hollinghead said. “They kind of feel like did not show as much as what their potential was last year.

“That is glaring that we have to get better.”

The team has broken down swing and taken one-on-one time to improve over the off-season.

“They have really kind of taken that on themselves to get quality reps and get better in the facility and the cages,” Hollinghead added. “I will be highly surprised if we do not have a much better showing at the plate this year.”

Edwards will be a tough out and smart at the plate batter while Saffles has swung well in the pre-season. Broad continues to show well and will feature early in the lineup.

McJunkin will play a key role along with Sanders, who returns the best average at .303.

Cooper has a strong swing and has shown his knack for recognizing the progression and tweaks in his movement. Caden McConkey can hit the ball hard as a junior.

Smith is starting to hit the ball hard with senior transfer Jesse Winger adds to the team’s speed.

Wilson has also shown flashes at the plate.



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# Tellico Softball

Continued from Page 12

Ziglar combined for almost 110 innings last season and the plan is for the two to split time again.

The senior Yates-Matoy caught 104 innings last year but is working her way back from an off-season injury.

Ziglar caught 53.1 innings.

## Taking shape

Tellico continues to have several options across the infield. The personnel will vary with who is on the mound.

Dana Harmon returns to third base after posting 24 putouts and an .829 fielding percentage last season. Day will take a spot at shortstop with Taylor Rose as the option when Day is in the circle.

“It is going to be kind of like last year,” Swanson added.

Locking down second base will be Bella Wright, who finished the past season with a .922 fielding percentage, 52 putouts and five double plays.

Returning to first base will be Meya Keener. She brings 57 putouts and a .909 fielding percentage from 2024.

Tilly Shaw offers support at second base with Abbi Wear as an option at first base.

Tellico has plenty of options for the three spots in the outfield.

“In the outfield, we will probably have a little bit of rotation. It is pretty good and I am not going to let them sit,” Swanson said. “I am going to try to get them all playing because it is pretty close.”

Linder will take the lead in left field after posting a .921 fielding percentage last season. Harmon and Rose double as options in center field with the returning Addison Joines in right field.

Sydney Scott played a strong role in situations for Tellico a year ago. She adds to the mix.

“Sydney Scott did great for us last year. She jumped in and filled in for some big games,” Swanson added. “Plus we have a lot of other girls. We are trying to get all the junior varsity games and Saturdays we can get so they are playing.”

Organizing that amount of talent into the system is not an easy

task, but it is a challenge that most coaches would be happy with.

“It is tough. People need to remember that you are going to put your best out there,” Swanson said. “I feel like we are good enough. With the teams that we play that I feel like we should handle, that is where the girls are going to get their opportunity.”

“That is the only way you can keep your program growing.”

## Taking a swing

Tellico’s lineup batted a team .288 in 2024 with 189 hits, 49 extra-base hits, 111 RBIs and 131 runs.

Day is set to be the Lady Bears’ leadoff batter. In the six games she played before her injury, Day batted .375 with six hits.

Keener returns a .356 average with a pair of home runs and 22 RBIs. Rose, batting out of the two-hole, brings back a .342 average, 26 hits, a triple and 12 RBIs.

Moses batted .316 with a .314 from Yates-Matoy. Joines hit .250 last year with a .286 from Ziglar.

Harmon hit a .245 alongside a .224 from Wright.

“We should not be very weak and we have good speed. We are going to be able to hit and bunt,” Swanson said. “That is going to help us a whole lot.”

Tellico fields experience in every position, but remains a young team with only four seniors. The Lady Bears have an opportunity this spring to steer the program in a direction it can stay on for multiple seasons.

“We are a year older and a year wiser. There is a better understanding of what their role is and what they are going to do,” Swanson added. “Work ethics are better as you get older — that makes a difference. I look forward to it”

As Swanson continues through the basketball postseason, Jada Ahlers and Kaitlin Gray have led the team through practices.

“I miss being with them as much as I am, but with Kaitlyn and Jada, they will be fine,” Swanson said.

# Sweetwater Soccer

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“Overall, the mentality and effort they put on in every single practice that we have (is different). I told them at the beginning of conditioning — I asked them if they want to compete or if they want to play for fun,” Torres said. “There was not a single player who did not want (to compete). We even have some freshmen who could take other people’s positions because they are working for it and trying.”

The added faces to the roster have helped invigorate a competitive preseason and atmosphere.

“If they do not keep working for the position, there is going to be

someone who can take the position,” Torres said. “We are having very good competition and I think that is pushing everybody harder and to be more dedicated to the team.”

## In safe hands

Returning between the sticks for Sweetwater will be Aiden McKenzie. McKenzie played a solid season last year as the starting goalkeeper in a Wildcat defense that allowed 2.4 goals per game last season with four shutouts.

“As of right now, I think he is in the best shape and did very good last year,” Torres said. “Of course,

we are going to give the opportunity to other goalkeepers to show what they have.”

Sweetwater adds depth in the position group with Aaron Torres, Marcus Randolph, and Radley Rhymes.

The Wildcats have a heavy load of midfielders, some will have to see some time on the defensive line and some in attack.

The defensive line will feature a pair of underclassmen mixed with two juniors and a senior.

Colton Holder will start at center back.

“He is a player who will be holding in the back this year,”

Torres said. “We have too many midfielders this year, so some of the midfielders will have to help us in the back.”

He will be joined by Will Bowman and freshman Connor Pippin.

Sweetwater adds depth with Jordan as well as Kaiden Johnkins.

“I think those are the more solid defenders that we have right now. I feel more solid about our defensive line,” Torres added.

The Wildcats are looking to return to a 4-3-3 this spring. That work starts in the midfield with a

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# Sweetwater Soccer

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pair of experienced seniors.

Gabby Bedola will play a key role as a holding center midfielder for Sweetwater.

“He is not the kind of player who is making quick runs, but he is the kind of player that can hold the ball,” Torres said. “He is very, very smart — looking for through passes, one-tvos and all that.”

Alongside him will be Cam Pippin. Pippin is another returning starter who brings an attitude and edge to the team.

“I think his leadership (is important). He is a kid with temper and I like that for him,” Torres said. “We just want to find a way to use that temper to our advantage. He is the kind of player that can be a leader in the back, talk to players in front of him and help him.

“I think from the seniors, Cam and Gabby, can really be a supportive role of the other kids. They are very confident and they can be something that helps other players.”

Sweetwater is capable of moving into a base 4-4-2 depending on how the 4-3-3 matches the personnel in the early part of the

season.

“I think having too many midfielders and not too many strikers, some of those midfielders will be playing up,” Torres said. “That way they also have more playing time. We are trying to move pieces around to get everyone involved.”

## Leading the charge

Sweetwater will start the season without Bryce Teutimez and could face the whole season without the sophomore striker.

“I hope he recovers quickly, so we can have him back but, right now, he is still recovering,” Torres said.

Teutimez led Sweetwater in goals and assists last spring.

The Wildcats will have Justin Deaton as an option as a center attacking mid or as a No. 9.

“He has very good footwork,” Torres said.

Cy Prince is also an option in the attack. Prince brings a radar for goal.

“His aim is just amazing. He can score from anywhere from outside the box,” Torres

said. “He is one of the players that I expect to score more goals this year, but we will see.”

Freshman Ethan Calderon has also had a strong preseason, showing off his work ethic.

“He is the kind of player that can pressure the whole defense, win the ball and score. He just needs more confidence and playing time with the bigger boys,” Torres added.

The Wildcats also have two more potentially influential freshmen with Anderson Lovingood and Caleb Flynt.

“They know each other very well and you can tell when they are playing that one of them knows what the other one is going to make a run or a pass,” Torres said. “They are not very familiar with the formation that we are playing right now, but those are two freshmen that I think can learn a lot this year and help the team.”

Sweetwater also has options in seniors Noah Harding and Josiah Harding.

Sweetwater will compete in District 3-A with Brainerd, CSLA, McMinn Central, Polk County, Tellico Plains and Tyner Academy.

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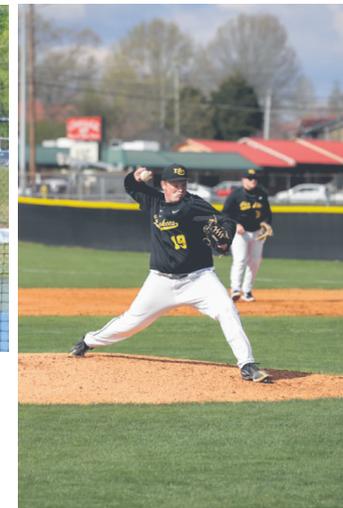
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