



2026 **SPRING** **SPORTS**

**A Preview
for McMinn,
Monroe, and
Meigs counties!**

**A special publication of The Daily Post-Athenian
and The Advocate & Democrat**

Lady Cherokees preparing for inaugural flag football season

Girls' flag football is one of the fastest growing high school sports in the U.S. and that was reflected locally with the tryouts for McMinn County's inaugural team.

According to Jason Cardin, the head coach of the new program, more than 60 girls tried out back in the fall, making narrowing the roster down to roughly half that size a challenge right away.

"That shows us there is a lot of interest and a lot of good athletes came out," Cardin said. "We had to trim down our rosters and we have settled at 31. There have been a lot of players that have stood out this spring for sure."

A teacher at McMinn, Cardin's incoming football experience has been as a TSSAA official for the last 15 years and flag football sparked his interest when he was officiating 7-on-7 camps at the University of Tennessee and for

FCA.

Flag football, coincidentally, is seven players per side, though there are plenty of differences, as Cardin noted that the sport "is as new for me as it is our players."

"There are a lot of similarities but still a lot of differences," Cardin said. "Flag football is (one of) the fastest growing sport in the country and has tons of opportunity for girls specifically. Colleges are adding this sport at a high rate."

Perhaps befitting this being the first year of flag football at McMinn, most of the Lady Cherokees' key players are freshmen and sophomores. In fact, on defense, all starters are either freshmen or sophomores.

And, according to Cardin, it is the defense that has especially excelled in preseason scrimmages.

"As a unit they have worked

very well together and thus far have been overall most impressive part of the team," Cardin said.

Many of the names on the starting defense are familiar for those who follow McMinn's other girls' sports, including Molly Trentham, Aven Hennessee, Braelyn Fields, Lilly Skidmore, Kovi Cardin and Jaymee Wall from basketball, as well as Brooklyn Sledge from soccer anchoring the defense at the nose.

Trentham and Hennessee are edge rushers, Fields and Skidmore are at the corners, and Kovi Cardin and Wall at the safeties.

Jason Cardin has been impressed with the leadership Sledge has taken in the middle of the defense.

"She's taken ownership of that position and really become a leader of that defense," Cardin said.

"She stays in the middle, just mak-

ing sure everybody knows what their assignment is."

Offensively, junior Lillie White is the starting quarterback – at least for now. As the season goes, Cardin noted White could be involved at other positions on the team. She started at quarterback in the Lady Tribe's 37-0 program-opening win over Chattanooga Girls' Leadership Academy, throwing for two touchdowns, but she also caught a 55-yard touchdown pass in the third quarter.

"She is a player we want involved in one way or another," Cardin said of White. "She's a fantastic athlete and will start our season at quarterback, but that may or may not be where she is most valuable to us."

Addie Miller, a sophomore,

SEE Flag Football, Page 20



Young Sequoyah softball team ready for new year

Sequoyah softball is young this spring, but that has not stopped the team from showing its eagerness to take the field.

With only one returning full-time starter, the Lady Chiefs have plenty of room to grow this season.

“We are really, really young and even more inexperienced,” Sequoyah coach Allen Roberts said. “What stands out to me this past month is just how hard they have worked. Out of all the years I have been at Sequoyah, these past three weeks are probably the most enjoyable three weeks of practice I have ever had.

“They are young, but they are very eager and have really worked hard.”

The Lady Chiefs roster only 13 players this season, with seven of those being underclassmen.

“They have nowhere to go but up. Because of the inexperience, we do not have a lot of girls who have played travel ball. Our entire starting lineup is going to be new to the high school level,” Roberts added. “But, watching them grow is what it is all about. We have preached to them about ‘Learning to work hard,’ and everything else kind of takes care of itself over time.”

Sequoyah has a pair of arms to take over pitching in place of Kaleigh Atchley, who has transferred to Florida.

Kaizen Cansler returns after pitching the bulk of JV innings for the Chiefs. The junior will pair with Maddie Harris, a freshman, in the circle.

“They will be the two who do all of the pitching for us. My plan is to use both of them quite a bit,” Roberts said. “We will probably be kind of rotating them around a little bit and using them both in the same games. We are letting them grow throughout the season.”

Both pitched for Sequoyah in playdays ahead of the season and



Courtesy of Lifetouch

got better as the day advanced.

One returner is junior Kadence Sutton, who moves to third base from the outfield. Sutton can split time with Cansler depending on who is pitching.

At 13 players, flexibility will be a key in Sequoyah's growth this year.

A pair of athletes could take up shortstop. Freshmen Morgan Worley and Isabella Kilpatrick have been battling it out and could split the role.

Faith Ferree, a junior, is taking up second base while Bella Bledsoe, a senior who has not

played since her freshman year, is at first base.

Behind the plate, Lillie Moore takes back over. Moore, a junior, played for Roberts in middle school and has transferred back from Oklahoma.

Maddie Koch brings the experience to center field.

“I feel she is as good as anyone around. She is a really good centerfielder and solid defensively,” Roberts said. “She has done a good job for us out there the last couple years.”

Harris and Kylie Holcomb can

see time in left field with Kilpatrick, Sutton, Jaeden Prowant and Makenzie Nettles as options in right field.

At the plate is something that has taken off for Sequoyah over the offseason.

“They have improved so much over the fall and the winter. We are inexperienced, but I do not know if I have ever had a group that has improved this much as this group has in hitting,” Roberts said. “They are really listening and willing to take on what they are being taught.”

The bats looked good in scrimmages against Lenoir City and Coker County and picked up five hits in the opener against Eagleton Academy.

“Three of the four pitchers we faced pitched for very good teams and we put the bat on the ball. I was very encouraged by what I watched,” Roberts said. “The strikeouts were very minimal all day and the girls were putting the ball in play.”

Moore is a candidate to lead off with Bledsoe, Cansler, Ferree and Sutton bringing power.

Koch brings experience at the plate and sophomore Brooklyn McDonald adds a jolt of speed to the offense.

“I feel like the lineup, even though our inexperience is going to show at times, I am excited to see what they can do,” Roberts said. “I think they are going to continue to get better as the season goes.”

Sequoyah will have to rely on its underclassmen this spring, but the group has shown promise at the start.

“The younger girls (Harris, Kilpatrick and Morgan), I feel like will be okay. They can all run and have pretty good speed,” Roberts said. “I feel like they will step in there and battle. They just need to grow and get the experience.”

Charger baseball had key losses, expectations still high

The standard has reached the stratosphere in Englewood and Chris Shepherd is a big reason why.

And so it's no surprise that when discussing the potential of the 2026 Chargers — even after losing four players to graduation and collegiate baseball — Shepherd is excited and expectant for this group's ceiling.

The Chargers lost ace Tyler Oaks to Western Carolina and their other ace-caliber arm in Zak Derrick is now at JUCO powerhouse Walters State. In addition, key bats Ayden Plemons and Devon Paxton are at Pellissippi State and Roane State, respectively.

Central went 23-15 in 2025, winning the district championship before falling in the region title game. The Chargers' season ended in the Class AA sectionals to Alcoa.

Although Central lost big talent, it returns key contributors, namely a senior trio.

Returning for Central, at the forefront, is senior duo Hunter Rayburn and Bryce Hammond, both of whom signed to the next level just before the season. Rayburn is staying close to home at Tennessee Wesleyan, while Hammond is headed up north to Milligan University.

Another pivotal senior along with Rayburn and Hammond is Central ace Evan Preston. Preston is the Chargers' number one starter, Rayburn number two and Hammond third. When Rayburn's not pitching, he plays in the outfield and when Hammond doesn't pitch he mans the hot corner.

"I can't say enough good things about Evan Preston," said

Shepherd. "He's a great kid, a great player and a competitor."

Rayburn, who bats leadoff for the Chargers after hitting over .400 in 2025, can spray the ball all over the field for Central. He's also a threat on the basepaths with top-speed.

"When Hunter Rayburn is swinging it, it's scary. When he gets hot, there's nobody that can stop him," Shepherd said. "It's been so fun to watch that kid play."

And Hammond, who had a killer freshman season on the mound in 2023, is coming back into his own in the 2026 offseason at the plate, too.

"Bryce hit over .300 last year and then he had an even better summer and fall at the plate," Shepherd said. "I mean, he's constantly working. He's always hitting with his dad in their basement and he's always

asking me to let him in to hit. He's a great kid and nobody is going to outwork him."

Fellow seniors with that key trio include Kenson Wilcox, who Shepherd raved about as the Chargers' every day shortstop and sometimes catcher, and key hitter Evan Medina.

Juniors include Austin Evans, Lucas Eaton and Corbyn Frisbie — who broke onto the scene as a sophomore last year, stamping himself as one of the area's best hitters.

A large sophomore class sees Blaine McKee catching, Hudson Reed starting at DH, Henry Woods starting in center field, Chase Nichols starting at second base and Dylan Jacobs starting in either left field or shortstop. Evan James, also a sophomore, serves as the Chargers' number four pitcher.



**Voted Best
Preowned
Auto Dealer
23 Years in a
Row!**



**The Largest Selection of
Pre-Owned Autos in the Area!**

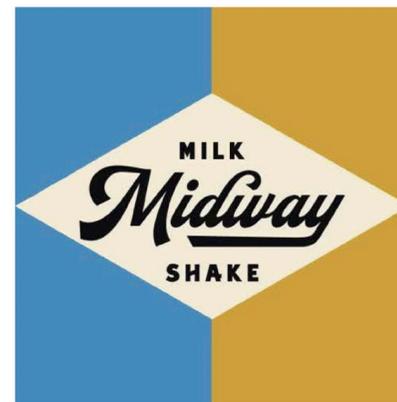
easttennesseeautooutlet.com

2022 Tennessee Independent Dealer of the Year



**Mini Golf Course
next to the
Restaurant**

2240 Hwy 30 E Athens, TN 865.310.2018
Midwayminigolf.com



Tellico Plains brings young, eager team into 2026

Tellico Plains' track team this spring might be smaller than normal and it might be a tad more youthful than normal, but the Bears and Lady Bears hope to just be as competitive.

"We have a bunch of new, young freshmen coming in. I am excited to see what they can do. We are trying to figure out what events they want to do and to see them grow in the sport," Tellico Plains assistant coach Chris Wiseman said. "It is a learning curve for them. 'How do I line up? How do I do this?' and trying to get all of that figured out."

Wiseman typically works with throwers with Mitchell Witt as head coach. Witt has been around Tellico track for a while.

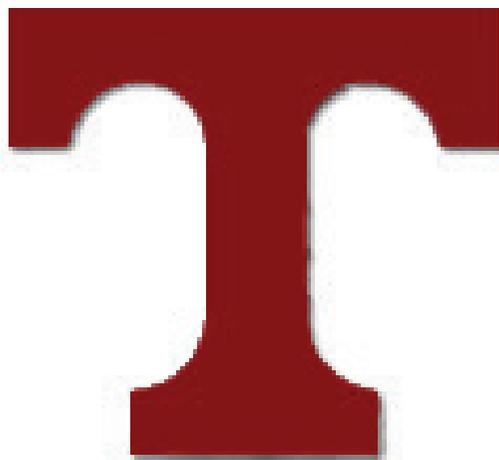
"It seems to be promising. It feels like we have been down because we lost Coach (Barry) Carroll," Wiseman said.

Carroll left after last season to coach at McMinn East.

"We have only had 12 or 14 kids who are at practice. I mentioned that to him the other day, but he said, 'Some years it is just like that,'" Wiseman said. "We have a pretty good group at the junior high and, hopefully, if we can get the track built, that will hopefully spark some interest over the summer."

Working with a team that is younger, one of the goals is finding where players best fit in events.

"It is kind of hard to see where they are. Once they get a meet under their belt, it is, 'Hey, how did you like that event? Would you



like to try another event,'" Wiseman said. "With goals, we can kind of fine-tune it. For a lot of these people, it has been a while since they ran and they do not know where they are at."

"It is a sport where if you just do it in the season, it is probably not going to benefit you."

As more meets are done — the first two have been canceled due to weather — Tellico expects to see student-athletes start to find their spots and focus on working in that field.

"Maybe it is working on swing development or maybe it is working on aerobics, where they can run longer or faster. Just different things like that," Wiseman added.

There are familiar faces around the program, however.

Senior A.C. Carter returns after qualifying

for sectionals last season.

"He is looking promising this year, if he can continue to develop and everything," Wiseman said.

Another runner is sophomore Drake Reynolds, who returns and is an option for mid-distances like the 800-meter and 1600m.

Sophomore Devin Vonevera has also had a strong preseason with hopes for a promising season.

"He seems to be stubborn and seems like he would be pretty good," Wiseman said. "We have a couple of other boys that are developing and some hurdlers. It is just trying and to do your best."

"If it is something you can better yourself, more power to you."

Another recognizable name for the Lady Bears is Delilah Reed, fresh off a historic basketball season.

Reed will compete as a high jumper but also in middle-distance runs.

"We are excited to see where she is at," Wiseman added.

Basketball teammate Kiely Smith may compete as well, depending on how she recovers from an injury she suffered late in basketball season.

Charity Hudgins, one of four juniors on the Lady Bears' roster, will compete in the long jump and high jump.

SEE TP Track, Page 26

Bears soccer looking for progress in 2026 season

Tellico Plains soccer has the chance to continue growing the sport in the school this spring.

The Bears add proven athletes to the roster for the 2026 roster, but the program is still looking to add numbers to a team that hopes to field 16 players.

"I am optimistic. The way that I look at it, we probably have the best team since I have got here," Tellico Plains coach Martin Calvillo said. "They can play, but (we are working) on playing together as a team and to get to know each other."

Tellico will look to start in a 4-4-2 this season, but could expand the formation after a few games.

"We do not have the mentality to play any other formations. We are going to start with the basics and go

from there," Calvillo said.

Tellico's first game, scheduled for March 5, was canceled, but the Bears did take the field for the first time on March 7 in the team's alumni game.

Tellico got some offense going, scoring three goals, but the program still has ground it hopes to make up as the season advances.

Three captains help to set Tellico's shape on the field.

Junior Eriksson Sporre, a transfer from Florida, leads the defense and has had a solid preseason.

Clint Moser captains the team out of center midfield. Moser, a senior, has excelled across several sports and brings

a notable athleticism and engine to the field.

"They are the first ones to show up to the field and they do their work,"

Calvillo added.

The Bears will also get a boost from Laken Woods, another captain, and

SEE TP Soccer, Page 19

*Good Luck to all
Area Teams!
Go Bears!*



Town of Tellico Plains
405 Veterans Memorial Dr.
Tellico Plains, TN



Baseball Tigers have high hopes for 2026

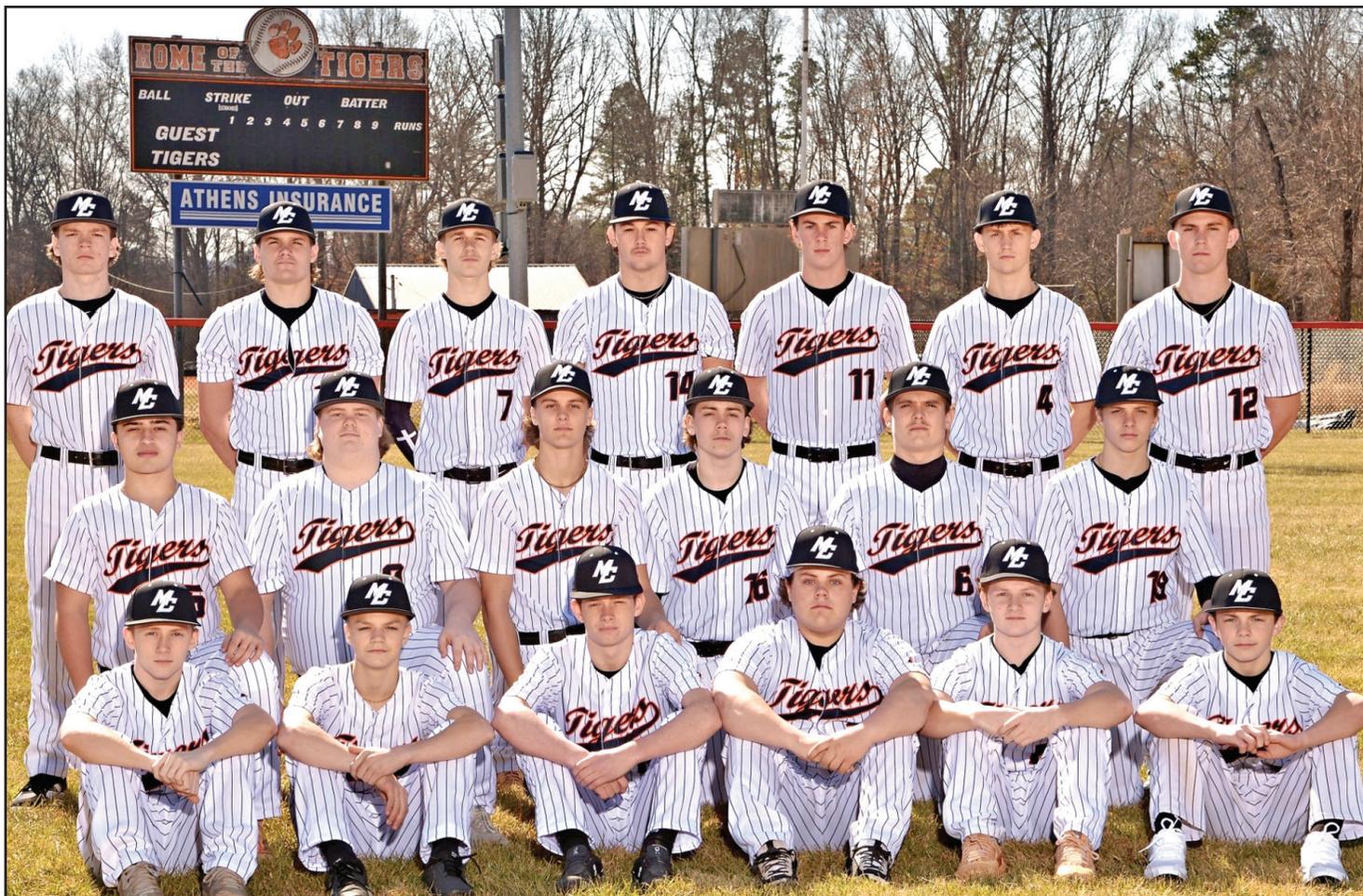
Those freshmen and sophomores from Meigs County's baseball team last year who went 18-8 and were a few inches on a hard line drive away from possibly eliminating eventual TSSAA state tournament squad Sweetwater, are now a year older and an offseason stronger.

Only two seniors graduated off that team and, naturally, expectations for the Tigers in 2026 have reached the stratosphere, both in Decatur and among outside observers.

"We have placed a strong emphasis on weight room training this offseason and the improvements in our returning players have been very noticeable," said Walker Malone, entering his third season as the Tigers' head coach. "We're excited about this team, especially with so many players bringing valuable varsity level experience back. Our focus remains on what we can control: effort, preparation, attitude, playing for one another and glorifying God in each and everything we do."

Returning eight positive starters and 15 players in all from 2025, Meigs garnered a preseason No. 16 Class 2A ranking in the Tennessee Baseball Coaches Association (TBCA) state poll.

Moreover, junior



Submitted

Bowen Combs was named to the TBCA Mr. Baseball pre-season watch list, coming off a sophomore season of a .517 batting average, .589 on-base percentage, two home runs and 20 stolen bases.

Combs is one of three All-District 3-2A selections from last year that all return for Meigs, along with senior Brody Goines and junior Briar Roberts.

Goines is the returning leader of the Tigers' pitching staff and also brings back junior-season offensive numbers of

a .342 batting average, .485 on-base percentage and 20 stolen bases.

Combs, Goines and Roberts, as well as Titus Fowler, Adam Mason and Maddux Andrews make it six returning batters who all hit better than .300 last year.

Pitching-wise, Chris Hull and Caden Crisp are both back as sophomores after contributing valuable innings on the mound as freshmen in 2025. That means the Tigers return their top-three pitchers from last season.

Rounding out

the Tigers' roster are seniors Jaxon Hope and Gavin Withrow, juniors Tucker Brewer and Colt Howard, sophomores Evan Ingham, Aiden Ingham, Gunner

Lunsford and Tyler Marler, and freshmen Bryson Godsey, Cutter Harris, Jace Preston and Stillman Haga.

Meigs started the season 2-1 in its first week, silencing

Midway 10-0, falling 6-2 at Rhea County, then bouncing back with a 9-3 win over Sale Creek.

The Tigers began District 3-2A play March 16 at Sweetwater.



Meigs County Department of Education

Clint Baker, Director

Chairperson- Amber Ammons • Vice Chairperson- Amy Swanks
Julie Boyd • Andy Andrews • Mike McKenzie

"Today's Child... Tomorrow's Hope"

Sweetwater brings experience, talent back to pitch in 2026

Sweetwater soccer is heading into the new season with a roster that brings experience and talent to the pitch this spring.

“We have been conditioning and working over the month with the basic fundamentals. But, this year, I see a lot of potential in the boys, especially those players who play competitively or stay active in the offseason with the boys’ soccer team,” Sweetwater coach Ricardo Torres said. “This year, I think the boys really want to play better. They have put in the work on the conditioning part. For me, as a coach, not having to worry about the boys not being in shape or not knowing the basics is a huge positive thing.

“Now, we can focus more on the tactics and other parts of the game. I think the mentality is very positive for the players.”

Sweetwater won 11 games last season, finishing one game short of a spot in the District 3-A Championship game, something that has left the squad eager to improve on in the new year.

“Most of them have a big winning mentality. They want to put

the work and time in,” Torres added. “They are very skilled and the mentality is going to make the difference this year.”

The strength in Sweetwater comes from a talented and crowded midfield, something that the Wildcats can take advantage of out of a 4-2-3-1 or a 4-3-3 shape.

The group brings so much depth, it will see players spill over into the defensive and attacking thirds and hope to control the pace throughout the season.

“We are looking to play 4-2-3-1 or a 4-3-3. We have a few variations right now that the boys can play,” Torres said. “We are focusing on a very attacking formation with more numbers on top.”

Sweetwater’s midfield boasts an experienced senior in Justin Deaton and a well-versed junior in Jordan Evans.

That pair makes a strong foundation that benefits from senior Angel Quintino as well as sophomore Caleb Flynt.

“They are very solid players and very experienced,” Torres said. “(Flynt) is a very calm and

very strong player. Those players will be the key in the attacking moments for us.”

Some of that will mix into an attack that scored 55 goals last season.

The younger attack is made up mostly of juniors and sophomores, with players like Ethan Calderon and Marvin Bustillos competing for minutes.

“We have some younger players that have been working hard through conditioning,” Torres added. “We have a lot of midfield and some of them can play up top, so we will probably do some movements up top and in the middle to make that work.

“Having those strong and skillful midfielders, we can work around with our strikers and make some changes this year.”

As a team, Sweetwater allowed 38 goals last spring. That number drops to 26 when you take away the opening games against Chattanooga Christian and East Ridge.

Returning between the sticks for Sweetwater will be Aiden McKenzie, in goal for his senior season.

The defense has experience in front of him. Will Bowman and Colton Holder have played well previously, while freshman Mateo Mora Rodriguez and sophomore Ryan Martin join the mix.

Senior Kaiden Johnkins is joined by sophomore Anderson Lovingood to add fuel to an already talented group.

“We have a very solid defense this year, so that is great,” Torres said.

Sweetwater starts its season with Halls on March 5 and then a trip to Greenback on March 10.

“We have very skillful players and potential. We just have to get on track and do some good things from the beginning of the season,” Torres said. “From there, we will see what is next.”

In District 3-A, Sweetwater will be joined by CSLA, McMinn Central, Tellico Plains and Tyner Academy.

CSLA and Tyner Academy represented the district in the Region 2-A tournament last year, with CSLA advancing to the sectionals.



McMinn tennis aiming for top of district in 2026

Both McMinn County tennis teams were second in their district last year and this spring they are both aiming to take one more step up to the top.

The boys' team graduated only one senior among its top six players last year.

Returning as the Cherokees' No. 1 player is Andrew Brown. Brown reached the region semifinals last season, in which he narrowly lost, and is seeking his own individual breakthrough all the way to the TSSAA Spring Fling, as well as a breakthrough for the team as a whole.

"Andrew Brown should have a great senior year and hopes to go all the way to state this year," said McMinn head coach Lynn Monroe.

The girls' team, on the other hand, has a few more new faces. Two-time region finalist Hanah Clark is among the three seniors who graduated from the Lady Cherokees' top six last year.

Mina Kurowski, a junior, is the girls' No. 1 player to start the season. The younger sister of three-time state tournament player Elena Kurowski will be defending that top spot all spring and Monroe believes she can do that and win the district individually, as well.

"Mina Kurowski as a junior will be defending the No. 1 spot and could follow in her sister's footsteps to be top in the district," Monroe said.

Both teams feature younger players who could emerge this spring. On the boys' side, sophomores Carter Tinsman and Drew Trapp start the season at No. 2 and 3, respectively. Khade Parkinson, a junior, is also expected to be a formidable No. 4 player.

"Drew Trapp and Carter Tinsman have promising futures which could start this year," Monroe said. "They are a dynamic duo. Khade Parkinson will be a strong pivotal point on our team."

Rounding out the boys' top six are junior Jaxson Gonzalez at No. 5 and sophomore Derek Ramey at



No. 6.

On the girls' side, sophomore Sophie Holmes, who has only been playing tennis for two years, already begins her first fully varsity season as the Lady Cherokees' No. 2 player.

Holmes played doubles on varsity last year as a freshman before ascending to the full top six this spring and Monroe believes she can push Kurowski at No. 1 as the spring proceeds.

"Young Sophie Holmes is competing for that No. 1 spot and should make some waves this year," Monroe said. "This is only her second year playing tennis and she is on fire."

Rounding out the girls' top six are seniors Mia Sewell at No. 3 and Madi Bean at No. 4, sophomore Kirsten Jenkins at No. 5 and lone varsity freshman Anna Goforth at No. 6.

The rest of the boys' roster are: junior Fender Lawson, sophomores Cooper Howard and Crosby Aziz and freshmen Rev Alexander and Brayden Fields.

The rest of the girls' roster are: senior Halle Newman, sophomores Karrington Dills, Keely Kessler, Stormie Breedon and Keely Jenkins and freshmen Demi Pennington, Ava Cook, Emary Smith, Allison Mayfield and Elizabeth

Winters.

McMinn began its season the first week of March with both of its teams posting 9-0 home wins over both Ooltewah and Bradley Central from its region's opposite district.

McMinn's next home meet

is March 24 against Cleveland. McMinn's District 5-AA also includes Cleveland, Rhea County and Walker Valley.

In the opposing District 6-AA within Region 3-AA are Bradley Central, East Hamilton, Ooltewah and Soddy-Daisy.

From the first pitch to the final whistle, McMinn County Schools is *All In* for our students, our teams, and our community.

Sequoyah mixes experience, youth in new year

It has been a different kind of preseason for the Sequoyah Chiefs, but this year's baseball team has taken to the new style in preparation for a season that brings a mix of experienced players with new faces to the diamond.

"The biggest thing would be the growth and the quick adjustments. Things we have struggled with when we work on it might be ugly the first time, but they are retaining a lot of knowledge," Sequoyah coach Justin Rutherford said. "Teams do not always do that and this group has done a good job of making corrections and learning and growing from those things."

Rutherford is embarking on his first season as Sequoyah's head coach. In the start of his tenure, the Chiefs have looked at slowing things down in practice and working more on details in between drills.

"We have done some stuff different than in the past and other places," Rutherford said. "We have seen them making more growth, whether it is defense fundamentally or taking some swings.

"I think it has helped them to be able to see that growth and it is clicking a little bit easier for them."

The team is young in spots. Rostering only 17 players, eight on the roster are freshmen, with three seniors, juniors and sophomores on the team.

However, the group has taken to the changes with familiar faces around them. C.H. Thomas returns as an assistant coach alongside pitching coach Chris Jones and Josh Monhollen, the previous head coach in a new role.

"There are things that we really try to focus on fundamentally. We have a great pitching coach who really works mechanics and delivery," Rutherford said. "Monhollen does a fantastic job with our infielders and he is a great teacher of the game.

"We have done a lot with teaching and our skill is really improved. Now, we are at that spot where 'How do you play the game?' The more we play, the more we are

going to get baseball IQ."

Junior three-sport athlete Eli Byrum has been with basketball, but he is expected to be a key contributor on the mound and brings the most experience in terms of innings pitched.

"We expect big things from him," Rutherford said.

Another returner who will pitch is Aiden Cochran.

"Those are two juniors that have some varsity experience, so we are hoping for big things from them on the mound," Rutherford said.

Freshman James Lynn started on the mound for Sequoyah against Knoxville Webb. Sophomore Connor Watson started the season-opening win over Howard.

"We really think they are going to have a big impact for us this year," Rutherford added.

Senior Tristan Tipton brings plenty of experience across the diamond. In a utility role, he can take several spots in the infield or outfield.

Lynn has appeared at shortstop with Cochran at third. Freshman Noah Watson has already won time at second base. Senior three-sport athlete Josh Phillips is at first.

The Chiefs add depth with freshmen Will Thomas and Connor Ogle. Ogle has started the season at catcher and Thomas ran plenty of drills at first base in the preseason.

Sophomore Jayden Crisp is also a potential factor behind the plate.

When not on the mound, Byrum is a talented and quick glove in center field with senior Noah Summey in left and Thomas as an option in right field.

Isaac Mills and Connor Watson add to the outfield mix as well as the ever-versatile Tipton.

The 1-2-3 of Sequoyah's lineup starts with experience — Tipton, Byrum and Cochran help set the tone with the back half of the lineup, mostly made up of the freshmen group, already settling in.



Courtesy of Lifetouch

MADISONVILLE A&W

3989 Highway 411, Madisonville, TN 37354

423-442-2128

WISHING
ALL
COUNTY
TEAMS A
GREAT
SEASON!



ALL AMERICAN FOOD®

Madisonville A&W



©2026 A&W Restaurants, Inc.

Lady Charger softball blending returners with new talent under new coach

McMinn Central is under a new head coach, but a familiar face in Jordan Wright.

Further, it lost several key pieces to graduation or new adventures, and so the Lady Chargers are looking to blend new faces with a couple of key returners for the 2026 season.

In particular, Central lost its ace, Lauren Peterson, to graduation and to Cleveland State softball after it. In the coaches' box, Wright and previous head coach Britt Shaw swapped spots, with Shaw stepping into Wright's assistant role.

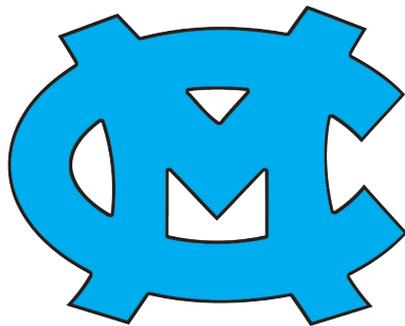
"I'm excited," said Wright when hired as head coach. "I'm excited to give back to a school that gave me something big growing up when I was in high school."

The Lady Chargers also lost key contributors Jayme Tiberio,

Maddy Hicks, Jaxyn Hawn and Josie Baldwin-Grueber to graduation. And arguably Central's best returning player, Mirra Freeman, opted out of playing her senior season.

Tack that on with several injuries hitting the Lady Chargers in preseason and Wright has her hands full before her first season.

"We've got a bunch of people hurt right now," said Wright. "I think we've got four injured – Brooke Martin, Madelynn Kyle, Addie Ingram and Meadow Hess. And then Emma Wilson will be late joining us because of basketball. But our girls that we do



have healthy are working really hard to get ready and I'm excited to roll with them all."

Central went 10-14 in the 2025 season, with its marquee win coming against rival Meigs County – a win over the Lady Tigers for the first

time in 18 years.

This year, the Lady Chargers will get star shortstop Lily Graves back, who committed to Cleveland State during the off-season. Longtime starter and key contributor Kara Duckett also returns, stepping in to the ace role as well as the leadoff hitter in the lineup.

Hess and Bailey Morrow join Graves as seniors, with both

starting in the lineup this season. Martin, Duckett, Amanda Burgin, Rae Stiner and Riley Thompson make up the juniors, with Stiner and Thompson batting at the fourth and fifth spots early in the 2026 season to this point.

The sophomore class consists of Malia Markwell, Kendal Martin and Elizabeth Flint, and then there are four freshmen: Addie Ingram, Emma Wilson, Jocelyn Sewell and Laney Hughes.

Wright is looking forward to seeing the team at full strength, but mentioned the injuries could help the depth get better.

"I do think some girls stepped up that didn't necessarily expect to have to and they just keep fighting regardless of the circumstances," she said. "I'm really proud of all of the girls for the fight, especially when we have yet to practice at full strength."

Meigs tennis seeks to replace pivotal duo, expectations still high



Danny Wilson mentioned Ethan Cross and Tynsley Peaden as big losses to his tennis program after the pair's graduation in 2025.

But he said the returning talent in the program worked tirelessly all summer and the expectation only continues to grow for the Lady Tigers and Tigers – win.

"We've added teams to our district this year, but I expect us to be at the top," said Wilson. "That's our expectation every year is to be number one. Boys and girls, that's what I expect from all these kids and that's what these kids expect."

Cross won the district championship last season and he and Peaden came just short of

state in the region individual championships at Roane State.

Of the new-look program, Wilson first mentioned senior Heart Calaycay, junior Gracie Garrett and senior Makenzie Brock as players he expects to contribute on the girls' side.

"Those will be leaders for the girls. I expect them to have a good year," Wilson said.

Rounding out the girls' side as potential contributors are Karmen Chase, Amilia Clark, Caroline Gray, Sophia Messer, Brooke Plaster, Sunny Sanderford and Stella Thomas.

On the boys' side, there will be three seniors which Wilson expects to contribute –

Johnathan Wade, Dylan Stokes and Jacob Teehan.

And then Wilson mentioned sophomore James Calaycay with high praise.

"He's a sophomore and I expect a lot out of him. Probably one the best young players I've ever had," Wilson said.

The boys team also includes Jayden Hicks and Gabe Ornelas.



Scan here to start earning rewards!



Exclusive Offers
Scan reward deals to save even more on your favorite made-from-scratch goodness.



Sweetwater softball ready for hopeful 2026 season

Sweetwater is eager for a promising 2026.

The Lady Wildcats replace six seniors off a team that reached the Class 2A sectionals last spring, but the roster is full of talented athletes who know each other and know their way around the diamond.

“We were so young last year and their maturity level has risen,” Sweetwater coach Sarah Davies said. “They have really come in on their own and they are working together. They are working hard and you can tell the work they have put in on the offseason.”

Across travel programs and lessons, the offseason has been good to the program.

“We are plugging in some people in some really big spots with freshmen and sophomores filling those holes,” Davies added. “Their softball IQ is just so high for being so young. You can see the amount of softball that these girls play, so we are not having to go over the basics.

“It is just figuring out what pieces work best and we are rolling with it. They are not missing a beat.”

An almost entirely new infield will make up the front of Sweetwater’s defense.

Chesney Isbill moves to catcher, while Sarah Hutchison, who missed most of last season, will move to first base.

“(Isbill) has stepped up behind the plate. What I have seen earlier in these scrimmages is she can handle herself and she is doing a great job,” Davies said. “(Hutchison) is so athletic, so smart and I am not the least bit worried there.”

It’s a familial thing in the middle with freshman Emory Woodruff at second base and Lilly Woodruff returning to shortstop.

A second freshman heads to third base in Lily Cleveland — an entirely new position for her.

“(Cleveland) is doing a great job learning that spot very quickly,” Davies said. “A whole new infield basically of young kids, but they are doing a great job.”

But inside the circle is Sweetwater’s strength.

Sadie Scott returns after throwing



Courtesy of Tommy Botello

three perfect games, two no-hitters, four one-hitters and five two-hitters last season with a 1.17 ERA across 155 innings.

“Sadie is just unbelievable. I have never seen the amount of work ethic on a kid in my career,” Davies added. “She has put on muscle, fine-tuned things, gained speed and, on top of that, she is just so strong.”

Freshman Cleveland is also showing she can add arm power, while Lilly Woodruff brings experience too.

“To top that off, Lily Cleveland, who is going to kind of step into that No. 2 role as pitcher. She will get a lot of starts this season to ease it off of Sadie,” Davies said. “She held her own in the scrimmages against Maryville and Sevierville.”

The outfield will be familiar with Baylee Bohrer, described as “the fastest child on Earth,” in center field.

“She can track anything. Things that should be base hits, she is robbing,” Davies said.

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.

Kyker Funeral & Cremation Services
 • Sweetwater • Harriman • Kingston
www.kykerfuneralhomes.com

Kyker Funeral Homes
 Funeral & Cremation Services

Hopes remain high for McMinn baseball despite tough district

McMinn County baseball faces a seismic shift in its competitive landscape this spring.

The latest TSSAA reclassification process moved the Cherokees away from their traditional district with their rivals to the south of Athens and threw them up north into District 4-4A with schools from the Knoxville area.

And in baseball, that new landscape is especially daunting, headlined by perennial state powerhouse and defending Class 4A state champion Farragut.

Those Admirals are hardly the only obstacle, either. While they were ranked Class 4A's No. 1 in the preseason Tennessee Baseball Coaches Association state poll, an Oak Ridge team featuring two Power Four commit pitchers was right behind them at No. 2.

And Bearden makes it three district opponents ranked in the preseason state poll at No. 13.

Adding to that mix a typically strong Hardin Valley baseball program, along with other district newcomers Rhea County and Lenoir City, and McMinn has a challenge ahead of it.

But head coach Matt Ray,

whose team is coming off an 18-13 record from 2025, believes his Cherokees are ready to navigate their new district. McMinn graduated three seniors from last year but returns 11 starters and multiple other players who contributed last season.

"I feel as if we have a very competitive, mature team," Ray said. "We have players who understand the game at a very high level. This team is a veteran team that understands what it takes to compete and be successful day in and day out. Our guys understand the type of work they must put in daily to have success in our new district. Even with the top-notch competition, I feel as if we have the ability to compete."

Jaser Arms, a senior and Alabama signee, mans center field and brings back a .357 batting average from last year. Chase McDonald, a senior signed with Tennessee Wesleyan, returns a .382 batting average from 2025 and will again man second base.

Other key returnees in the lineup are junior Luke Lawson with his .319 average and 2025 team Most Valuable Player Linc

Brazzell, a senior who hit .291 last spring.

Lawson is also a key returning player in the infield at shortstop and is also a vital part of the Tribe's committee of pitchers with his 1.40 ERA. Juniors Cooper Wilson at catcher and Auston Fugate at third base are also important players both in the lineup and on defense.

Within the rotation, the Cherokees will lean on senior Kade Hyde, an ETSU signee who brings back a 2.30 ERA, and junior Marshall Goodner who returns a 1.90 ERA from 2025 as their top two starters.

McMinn has used a number of players on the mound at various times early in the season, including but not limited to Lawson, McDonald, Brazzell, Arms, sophomore Bo Barnett, senior Jack Goodin, junior Matthew Woods and freshman Nolan Graves.

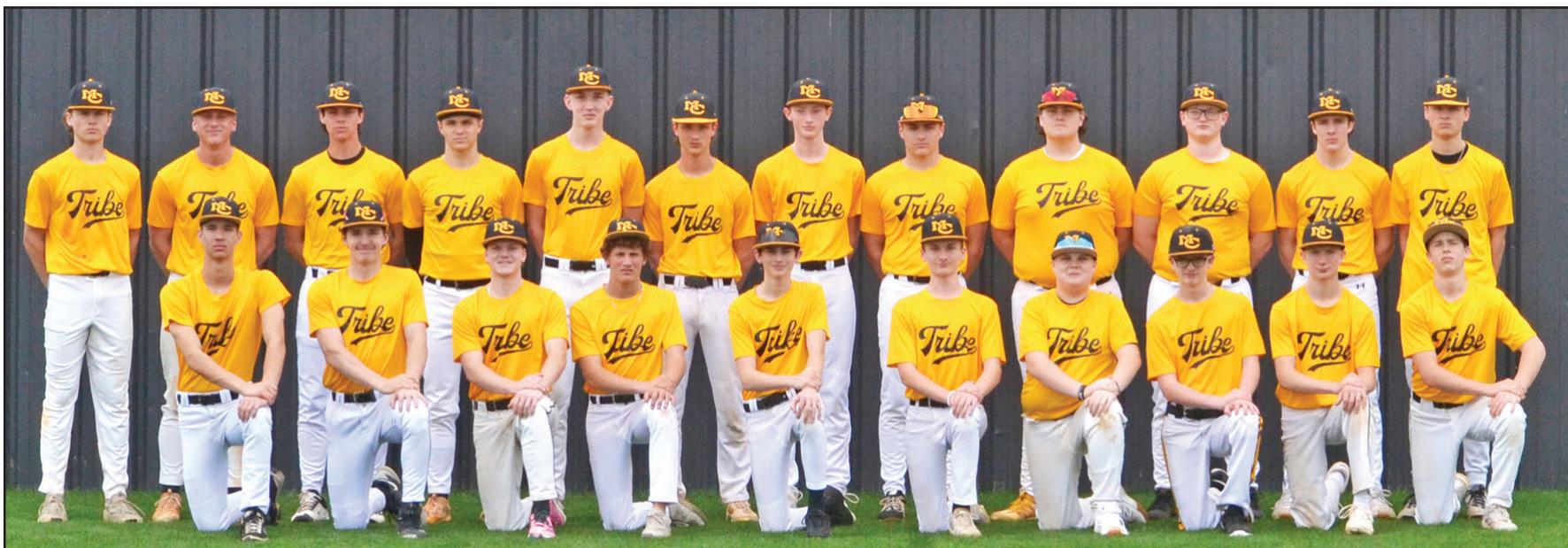
"We have a potentially very dangerous lineup with the capabilities of playing defense at a very high level," Ray said. "We anticipate a big year from multiple guys in the lineup and on the mound."

Rounding out the roster are freshmen Curtis Burger, Wyatt Falk, Roman Goins, Wyatt Graves, Kolton Hyde and Parker McDonald; sophomores Matthew Fletcher, Brayden Fowler, Sytan Hensley, Corbin Jackson and Alex Powers; and junior Jaxon Fugate.

McMinn started the season 3-0 with a sweep of traditional rival Walker Valley and a dominant win over Ooltewah before heading into district play against Oak Ridge.

The Cherokees lost the first game against the state-ranked Wildcats 2-1 on a walk-off, then were trailing 10-2 in the second leg in Athens in the bottom of the sixth inning but with bases loaded before rain halted play. The conclusion of that game may be played later in the season if necessary for District 4-4A seeding. The Tribe bounced back from that latter result with a 7-3 win over Chattanooga private school McCallie before heading to Panama City Beach for a tournament over Spring Break.

The Cherokees resume district play 7 p.m. March 23 at home against Rhea County.



Senior-heavy Tellico fields talented team for new season

Tellico Plains is loaded with experience this spring — talent, too.

The Lady Bears roster nine upperclassmen, skilled bats and powerful pitching ahead of the 2026 season.

“It is exciting. We have a lot of seniors and we have good pitching and good hitting,” Tellico Plains coach Don Swanson said.

Tellico got a taste of the season in the Tiger Classic on March 6 and 7. Despite going 1-3 against good competition, the Lady Bears saw good pitching and looked solid at the plate in a win against Midway but also in competitive losses to Meigs County, Girls Preparatory and Ooltewah.

Kadence Moses and Skyler Day — two senior pitchers — combined for 15.2 innings over the weekend with 19 strikeouts.

Moses and Day are recognizable names on Tellico's roster. The two pitched all but 0.2 innings last season.

Moses, who has signed with Roane State, pitched 86.1 innings

with 78 strikeouts and a 3.65 ERA. Moses faced 405 batters, allowing 86 hits and 45 earned runs.

Day makes it a 1-2 punch, returning after 53.2 innings last season with a 3.78 ERA and 65 strikeouts. With 65 strikeouts, she sat down nearly 25% of batters faced while allowing just 55 hits.

The circle adds depth as freshman Hannah Grace Taylor joins the pitching group alongside Paisley Gudger.

The two are not immediately available, but will add layers to the position.

“We have two studs, one really good young one and another pretty good middle-aged,” Swanson said.

Behind the plate, Tellico has yet another experienced and talented catcher.

Senior Jagger Ziglar caught 69.1 innings as a junior in a split role. Ahead of that, she caught 53 innings as a sophomore.

“Jagger has been really good. She has thrown out two or three (in the Tiger Classic) and hit the

ball well,” Swanson said. “We have been blessed in that spot. Jagger looks really good.”

Ziglar will also play after high school, after signing with Daytona Beach Christian University in Florida.

Over the Tiger Classic, Ziglar caught two runners stealing.

Defensively, Tellico is falling into its rhythm and shape, despite having a pair of holes to fill.

Taylor Rose graduated after holding down third base and shortstop, depending on the day. Another graduate, Abbi Wear, was a long-term first baseman for the Lady Bears.

Through the Tiger Classic, the position groups are taking shape. Addison Joines, a junior, takes over at first base while veteran senior Bella Wright returns to second base.

Wright finished last year with 27 putouts and a .913 fielding percentage.

When not pitching, Day and Moses factor into the left side of the infield with flexibility on spots.

Also adding to the mix is Sydney Scott, a sophomore, who played at both shortstop and third base.

The outfield looks familiar. Sophomore Lilli Wear and senior Taylor Chapman have appeared in right field with seniors Addison Woods and Meredith Linder in center field and left field, respectively.

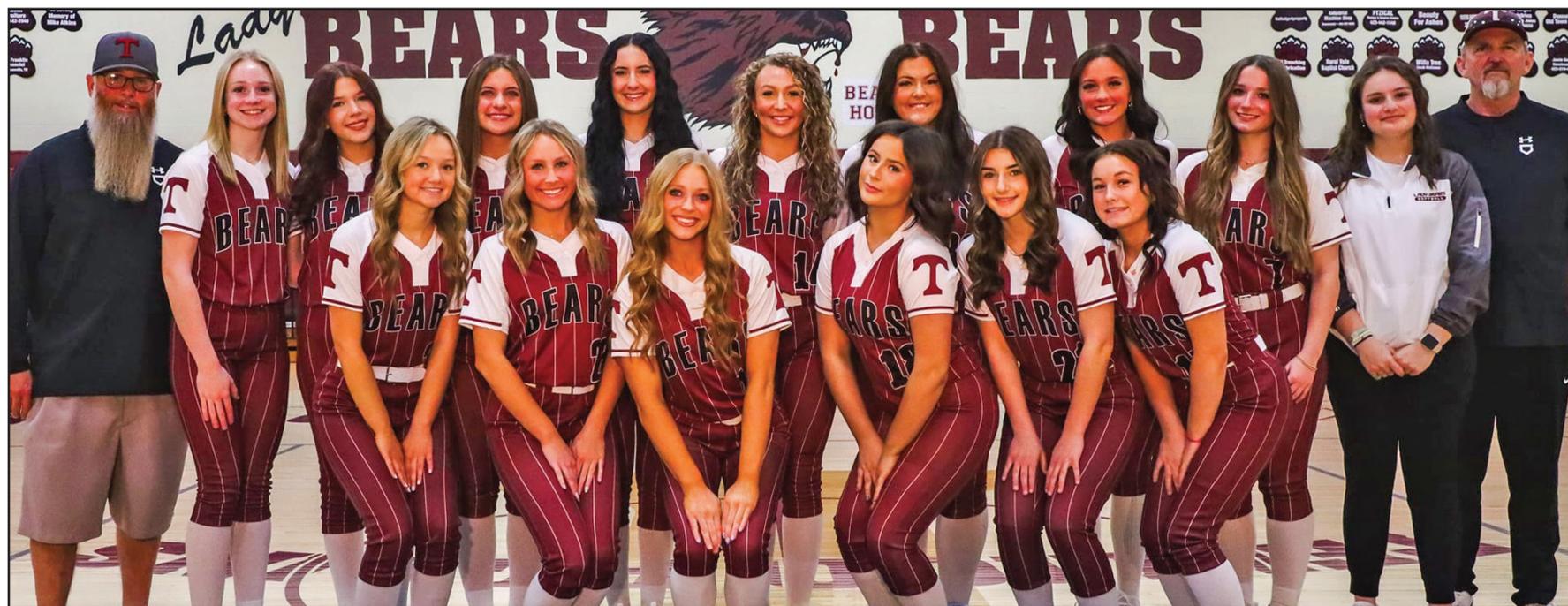
“They did good. I feel like the outfield did good and the infield has looked alright,” Swanson added. “At times, we have seven seniors on the field.”

Through the first four games, Tellico is batting .359 with 28 hits, 14 RBIs and 21 runs scored.

Day, Joines, Scott, Wright, Woods and Ziglar all notched extra-base hits.

“Not to swing the bat any more than they have against pitching, they have hit it good down here today,” Swanson said. “Especially the older kids who played quite a bit last year. They have stepped up

SEE TP Softball, Page 26



Courtesy of Danielle Proulx

New coach, same goals for Lady Tiger softball

In terms of the head coach, Meigs County softball begins a new era this spring.

Fortunately for Kirstie Neely, much of the team she takes over has been through the battles, with some talented newcomers as reinforcements.

Neely, who had been an assistant since 2014 before succeeding the retired Jeff Davis after his 22 years at the helm, has seven starters back from last year's group of Lady Tigers, which lost just three seniors to graduation.

Last year's team was a rebuild, ending in a 10-12 record. But those Lady Tigers had put together a five-game winning streak late into the season before finishing the District 3-2A tournament in fourth place and they look to build on that momentum this spring.

Meigs faces a tough District 3-2A again this season, with Kingston and Sweetwater both boasting a Division I signee or commit at pitcher, and Tellico Plains – which ended the Lady Tigers' season in the tournament last year – also a veteran-laden team in the mix.

But Neely believes with the preparation the Lady Tigers went through this offseason that they have as good a chance as anyone of getting into that top two and advance to region tournament play by the time postseason rolls around.



Submitted

"We had a great offseason," Neely said. "Girls worked hard and showed up every day ready to get better. We worked on some mental toughness that I think will help as we get deeper in the season. It's no secret how strong our district is. Anybody could beat anybody on any given day. I'm excited to see where we will be in May."

Three seniors headline these Lady Tigers, with Alexis "Cricket" Kazy holding down the catcher position as well as the middle of the batting lineup.

Annslee Maddron is one of the leaders in the outfield and

Cheyenne Snyder anchors the infield from her shortstop position and has been batting leadoff to start the season.

Returning junior Elizabeth Miller was the Lady Tigers' starting pitcher nearly all of last season, improving significantly as that season went along.

"Elizabeth Miller grew up a lot last year being the only arm we had," Neely said.

Miller will not have to go it alone this year, as she is joined on the pitching staff by three promising freshmen: Cali Armour, Makenna Long and Maddie Williams, all of whom

have seen significant time in the circle the Lady Tigers' first week of the season.

"Having this pitching staff will help tremendously," Neely said. "Any of them can throw on any day."

Also helping lead the outfield is junior Lainy Goforth, while sophomores Anniston Andrews and Bella Williams, junior Skylyn Payne and freshman Willow Hopson will see time there this season.

In the infield, juniors Brie Gallaher, Reagan Jennings and Kennedy Smith will see most of

SEE Meigs Softball, Page 26

SW Softball

Continued from Page 11

Senior Kylie Baylog returns to left field after missing last season with an arm injury. Andrea Jones takes up right field after missing all of last spring.

"(Baylog) is long and can get to them. She is back and her arm is back," Davies said. "(Jones) will be holding down right field and is doing a pretty good job."

As a team, Sweetwater batted .276 with 231 runs scored and 209 hits last year. Scott returns a .369 average, Bohrer brings back a .344 aver-

age and Woodruff returns after hitting .281.

"They all have worked so hard. We are going to lose some big bats with Tori Thompson and Madisyn Vestal, but with Lily Cleveland and the leadership at the plate from Lilly Woodruff, I see good things in the top of the lineup," Davies said.

Top-to-bottom, Sweetwater will have speed to match the loud bats.

"The speed in the bottom of the lineup is crazy. We are a super-fast team between Kylie

Baylog, Andrea, Chesney and even Sarah. All-around, we are extremely fast," Davies added. "We are going to be causing chaos, putting it down, bunting and we have our power hitters to come through."

It's a dynamic lineup that can also get a burst from freshman Kenzley Makowski in a pinch.

Emily Demotte will also add speed to the group and Dulce Laredo is another returner who can slide into roles.

Sequoyah ready for 2026 with nearly 50 athletes on roster

There is plenty of excitement around Sequoyah's track and field team this spring.

The Chiefs and Lady Chiefs field 47 athletes and enter the year with high hopes after a strong 2025 that saw the program break four school records.

"It is awesome. To get 50 athletes out here (is great) and they are being successful and working hard," Sequoyah coach Nathanael Schrimsher said. "I have a lot of kids who are doing the best that they can. I am proud of what I have got because they are working hard and they show up."

"I foresee a lot of those (records) getting broken by the same kids breaking their own records, but also I see kids breaking some new records maybe this year at Sequoyah."

With the most recent enrollment numbers from the TSSAA having Sequoyah at 771 students, nearly 1/16 of the school is on the track team.

The team also rosters a large senior class.

"They are looking really good this year and I think we have a chance of a few of them going to state," Schrimsher said.

Part of the excitement for Sequoyah comes from the boys' and girls' 4x100 relay teams.

"Both of the 4x100 relay teams look like they are going to be better than last year. We have a couple additions to those," Schrimsher added. "Everybody has improved from last year."

On the boys' side, Sequoyah runs with senior Quinten Peery, who has had a terrific off-season.



Courtesy of Lifetouch

"I think he is going to PR (personal record) at the first meet that we start and I think he is going to be real strong this year," Schrimsher said. "My other guys have grown a ton. I am really looking forward to those."

Running with Peery are Caleb Swabe, Dusty Tinsley and Daniel Macon — a sophomore who ran in middle school.

"We are looking at an uptrend there," Schrimsher added.

The girls' 4x100 will have recognizable names for basketball fans. Seniors Emily Hunt and Kali Compton return with transfer Eden Frasure from Lenoir City.

Rounding out the team is Haven Kaylor.

"Both of those teams look really stout this year. If we can get everything working well and they get a good run at sectionals, I think we have a good shot with both of those teams," Schrimsher said.

Savannah Kirkland, another senior, will run in the 400-meter.

"I am real excited to see how she does this year; I think she is going to be making a big leap," Schrimsher said.

Sequoyah also brings a pair of jumpers — Rylee Black and Caden Stallcup.

The two will both compete in the long jump and triple jump.

SEE SQ Track, Page 23



Danny Long, *P.T.*

Shannon Scoggins, *P.T.*

3709 Highway 411 • Madisonville, TN

423-442-1440

www.fyzical.com

Train Hard, Play Hard, Stay Strong!

We help athletes recover and perform at their best with treatment for:

Sports Injuries, Knee, Shoulder and Back Pain, Post Surgical Rehabilitation, Concussion & Balance Therapy, Strength & Return to Play Programs, and Aquatic Therapy.



Chargers usher in year one of Mike DeMotte era

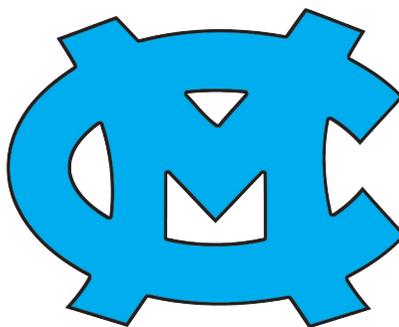
McMinn Central's boys soccer program has been without a full time head coach for a few years, but that has changed entering the 2026 season as Mike DeMotte takes the reigns.

DeMotte said he hopes the 2026 team builds the culture and standard he seeks to uphold in Englewood.

"When people hear winning, they think of the scoreboard," DeMotte said. "But winning to me is the byproduct of team chemistry, building character, overcoming adversity and it's just a whole bag of goodies. We've shown nothing but good signs of progression leading to that."

Central has shoes to fill in terms of vacated talent. Seven seniors graduated from the 2025 team, including three who signed to play soccer at the next level at Tennessee Wesleyan: Damian Jaimes, Quinton Grueber and Nick Jay.

Central boasts seven seniors – Xevon Johnson, Zymari Clary, Gabriel Kelley,



Bradley Mayfield, Ryder Moses, Gavin Neilson and Landon Giles.

The junior class is represented by William Mayfield, Irvyn de Luna and Aaron Brock.

Joselito Smith, Rhiley Rodriguez, Ramon Garcia, Gavin Million, Aiden Rodriguez and Angel Mercado make up the sophomores, and Harlee Cassada and Julian Arreguin make up the freshman class.

"Our six seniors are going to bring so much athleticism and leadership," DeMotte

said. "We're a young team outside of that, compiled with just freshmen and sophomores with a couple of juniors.

"Julian Arreguin is a standout player – a true footballer. He's on the Chattanooga Red Wolves' ECNL team and he's really going to be quite good for us," said DeMotte. "Angel Mercado was the fourth leading goal scorer last year and he is returning to a pivotal role for us. Then you have Irvyn de Luna, who's a bit of a quiet assassin guy. He brings a lot to the table.

"Mainly the rest of our guys just bring a complete willingness to compete with good attitudes. They do their job and we are going to compete as a team with them," said DeMotte.

Central went 8-8-1 in 2025, with wins coming over Tellico Plains, Oliver Springs, Harriman, Brainerd, Lookout Valley, Polk County and then Brainerd again in overtime. Its season came to an end against CSLA in district play.

McMinn softball low in numbers, ready to roll

McMinn County softball is lacking depth due to a variety of factors and there are just 11 players rostered in the program this season.

But second year head coach Jesse Mizell Anderson said the girls that she's got are fun to be around, fun to coach and have completely bought into the culture she's beginning to foster in her short tenure in Athens.

"It makes coaching so much more enjoyable when you're coaching kids who really want to be out there," Anderson said. "No hard feelings to any girls that have left our program. They have found joy in other teams and that's great. Softball is not for everybody. It's not everybody's first love and I totally get that. But it makes coaching so much more fun. The girls have expressed, too, that they are having a lot more fun when everybody on the team, coaches included, are like, 'Yes, this is my team. This is my sport.'"

Even if the Lady Cherokees



struggle on the scoreboard in a district loaded with 4A powers like Farragut, Oak Ridge, Bearden, etc., Anderson said the culture of the team is in a good spot.

"Everybody's working hard. Everybody's getting along. It just makes it more fun," Anderson said. "Regardless of what we do as far as score-wise, the girls know that they're getting better and that they just want go out and play the sport that they love, the sport that they fell in love with. Back when they were little girls learning to put a glove on their hands, they're just having fun in the sport they fell in love

with a long time ago."

Three seniors lead the way for McMinn this season – short-stop and leadoff hitter Brooklyn Barnett, ace Bailey Derrick and key starting contributor and outfielder Arlea Jones.

"The girls love Bailey, she is a good leader for us and makes good camaraderie with the team," Anderson said. "She not only leads off the field, but on the field with them too. She's got a great attitude and is our consistent pitcher. Arlea is playing center field for us, but she selflessly has stepped up and offered to catch any time we may need her and so she's been catching in the bullpen for us and will go in to catch whenever we may need her.

"Brooklyn moved in from the outfield where she played a lot last year and she's taken on the shortstop role with a great attitude and determination. At the plate, she's one of our best hitters," said Anderson.

Other contributors on the Lady Cherokee roster include

Grace Zehring, who starts at third base after transferring in from California, Ziomara Limon, Hayden Potter, Addie Rountree, Constance Human and Carmen Russell round out the Lady Cherokee starting lineup.

McMinn steps into a district that includes the aforementioned Farragut, Bearden and Oak Ridge on top of Rhea County, Lenoir City and Hardin Valley.

"It is a very competitive district," Anderson said. "Of course, we're going to face Farragut, which is probably the biggest team as far as just talent-wise that we're going to see. But my girls are up for the challenge. They know that they have to band together and that's something I've seen a lot out of them so far this season is they love each and they love playing together. They really do a good job of picking each other up and having each other's backs. If we're going to go down, we go down together. If we rise, we rise together."

McMinn soccer seeking to take next step in year 2 of Bailey era

Andy Bailey came away from McMinn County's offseason and preseason play believing the Tribe is coming together.

And after an opening year under Bailey with plenty of positives to take away, the Cherokees look to take the next step in 2026.

McMinn returned nearly all of its talent from the 2025 team, with 10 seniors leading the charge this season. In particular, leading goal scorers Michael Kraskouskas, Bryson Webb and Koby Cook are back as well as superstar goalkeeper Denney McPhail.

And then there are other key starters like Josh Lockmiller, Josh Webb, Albert Banegas and Henry Cook as senior leaders.

Rounding out the starting

group of non-seniors is junior Brendan Johnson, sophomore Derickson Saucedo and freshman Kevin Cruz.

"We do bring back a lot of starters, which starts with Denney or – as I call him – the human wall," Bailey said. "It's going to be very difficult for teams to score on us, for the most part, especially if it's not a one-on-one situation. Bryson Webb in the midfield is quarterbacking the field for us and pressing the ball forward, and he's an outstanding player for us on the field.

"Overall, the outlook is very high and we have high expectations to compete. Not to just to compete, but to win games this year."

McMinn finished the 2025 sea-

son with a 4-11 record, earning wins over Silverdale, Kingston, East Hamilton and Sweetwater on the campaign. Its season came to an end in the first round of district play to Walker Valley by a 3-1 score.

"Just looking at the overall product of our work that we have shown in the scrimmages, we have made drastic improvements compared to last year," Bailey said. "Just fundamentally, tactically and our approach to the game is all improved. We're hoping that can translate not just to competing, but to winning ball games."

Bailey retains two of his three assistants from last year. Former TWU Bulldog Zach Blair is the head assistant and former McMinn head coach Duane

Rikard remains on staff as the goalkeepers' coach.

Mike DeMotte, who coached with the team last year on Bailey's staff, left to take the head coaching job at McMinn Central during the offseason.



Powering the teams that power our future.

Athens Utilities Board

Your Neighbor. Your Utility.

www.aub.org

423-745-4501



Sequoyah looks to reshape program, foundation in 2026

Sequoyah soccer is looking to redefine itself.

The Chiefs head into the new season with a new coach, Marcel Betancourt, who hopes to return the program back towards the top of East Tennessee.

Betancourt, who has an extensive background in soccer and comes from Miami, knows it will be a process to get the program back towards competing in the district and beyond, but he is undeterred in embarking on the journey.

“To make them believe has been really, really hard, but they are budding,” Betancourt said.

The new coach is requiring changes such as players wearing ties to school to further the point of change.

“I did that for them to believe in themselves and see that everybody did it,” he explained. “And also for them to see that whenever you start work and go to an interview, that is what you need to wear. You need to look presentable.”

The approach is about business. Players are expected to carry themselves highly on the field, in class and outside of the school.

Betancourt has dove into the Four Fs as a way to get that across — faith, family, future and fun.

“They are buying into the program, too. Big time,” Betancourt added.

The Chiefs have been conditioning since October, with interest piquing in younger students, creating a team heavy with seven freshmen, 11 sophomores, 10 juniors and just four seniors.

But a roster of 32 players shows the willingness from student-athletes to buy into the changes for the program.

“Last semester, it was pulling hairs with them and showing what we need to do to get better,” Betancourt said of the changes



Courtesy of Lifetouch

over the past few months.

The program is also getting a boost in support from Hispanic business around Monroe County, per Betancourt.

Sequoyah, which in 2019 reached a Class AA Sectional, has established a weight-room program.

The Chiefs plan to run out a 4-4-2 this spring.

In goal, freshman Nathan Bower has taken to the position well and made 17 saves in the team's 4-1 season-opening loss to Grace Baptist out of Chattanooga.

Bower has worked with Betancourt diligently in the pre-season, focusing on being more vocal and commanding of the box, controlling set pieces and finding angles to attack shots.

Mateo Cortez, only a sophomore, is one of the more versatile options for the Chiefs.

Cortez, who is coming back from an injury, briefly played in the opener, scoring against Grace Baptist before scoring two days later against McMinn Central in a 3-2 win.

“He has potential to go anywhere he wants to go; that is how good he is. He has potential,” Betancourt said.

He has experience across the field, even in goal, and is an option for the team at wing, striker, in midfield or on defense.

Joining Cortez on the back line are Mario Zavala, junior Dawson Fry and junior D'Andrew Willians.

The Chiefs are looking to bolster up the midfield, the jobs that will help Sequoyah dictate the speed of the game or control possession.

“When it comes to soccer, the midfield is the one moving the ball, either back or forward. The midfield has to have the vision,” Betancourt said.

With the youth of the team, Betancourt hopes to see more confidence and control rise out of the position group as the season goes on.

In the attack, the Chiefs have already found a pair of goals.

Speedy sophomores Christopher Gonzalez and Cris Portillo both scored in the win

over McMinn Central.

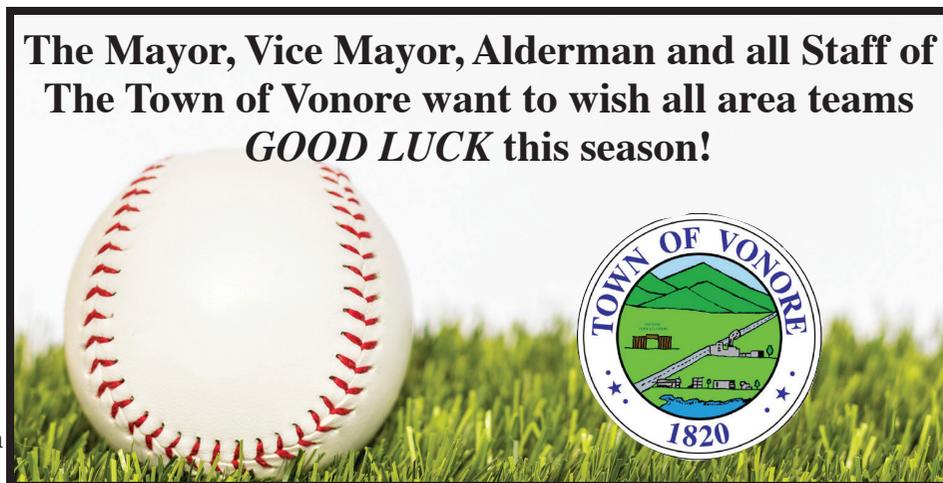
Kadin Haynes also features in the attack, a junior who brings more speed on the wing. Senior Bryan Vasquez adds to the lineup up front.

The Chiefs qualified for the region tournaments in 2021, '22 and '23, but have not appeared in it since 2023' quarterfinal trip to Signal Mountain.

Sequoyah competes in a very stout district, District 5-AA, alongside Alcoa, Heritage, Kingston, Loudon and South-Doyle.

In the past three seasons, the district has sent at least one team to the state tournament. In 2024, South-Doyle won the Class AA State Championship while Alcoa also qualified for the tournament.

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



Central tennis seeking to build on momentum

McMinn Central tennis is coming off a historic 2025 season and now it's looking to build further on it.

Both boys' and girls' teams swept district and region championships and reached their sectional matches last year. Central also sent a boys' and a girls' doubles team to the TSSAA state tournament, each of whom swept district and region titles along the way.

One half of each of those Spring Fling doubles teams is back. Landin McInturff, a senior, is the returning state tournament player for the boys, after the graduation of his doubles partner Bryson Riden.

Malea Masingale, still a junior, is the returning state tournament player for the girls, following the graduation of her doubles partner Reagan Baker.

"Coming off district and region championships in 2025, the program enters the new season with strong momentum," said Central head coach Katelyn Whitener. "While the girls team will work to replace several graduating seniors, the boys team returns a veteran group with solid depth. With returning state experience and talented underclassmen stepping into the lineup, expectations are high for another competitive season."

Of the two teams as a whole, the girls face a bit more of a rebuild, with several seniors of that team having graduated. But Whitener is confident in the previously younger girls stepping into new roles. The team is five juniors: Masingale,



Submitted

Mercedes Clay, Charlotte Franklin, Hannah Howard and Te'ojah Lowary.

There is also one senior, Isabella Elwood.

The boys, meanwhile, are a senior-laden and experienced group. Joining McInturff in that class of six are Caleb Bunch, Josiah Haire, Landon Harris, Josiah Richeson and Noah Warf. After those seniors, there is sophomore Gabe Fulbright and freshmen Riley Castro, Gavin Ingle and Lucas Key.

For both teams, it is a mix of experience and

promising youth that Whitener believes can continue to build off last year's successful campaign.

"With experienced players returning and several talented newcomers joining the program, the team will look to build on last year's success," Whitener said.

Central begins its season March 24 at Loudon, then plays its first home matches March 26 against Harriman.

Central's District 4-A includes Meigs County, Loudon, Kingston and Harriman.

TP Soccer

Continued from Page 5

Tidus Veal.

"There are also a couple of kids that have been playing for the last three years," Calvillo said. "They have improved tremendously over the last three years. They are only juniors and they keep the group together."

Sporre will be the Bears' last man on defense, with Moser dictating the midfield. Woods and Veal lead the line in the attacking third despite being new to the positions.

"They have improved, but they are still not that confident on playing up to," Calvillo said. "It is going to take a couple of games to get it, but I think they will be the best to play up top."

Tellico adds depth despite most of the roster's involvement in other things around the school through the spring, limiting the time the team can be fully together.

Shane McNabb, a senior, is coming back from an

injury and can handle physicality. Kal El Lingerfelt, another senior, has had a consistent preseason.

Jamarcus Frantzen, a senior, is set for a strong year at goalkeeper.

"We recruited him out of the football team and got him interested in soccer," Calvillo said. "He loves it, but, unfortunately, it is his last year. With a little work, I think he is one of the best goalies we have had since I have been here. I think he is going to be a really good goalie. He is an asset here."

McNabb will join Sporre in defense, alongside Lingerfelt and Rowdy Russell.

In midfield, Moser is joined by junior Carter Varnado as well as junior Myles Keener.

Robbie Dereme, a junior, is new to the team and can deliver on the field.

Jake Best, a senior, joins Woods and Veal in the attack but also adds support in the midfield.

Tellico's season will see the Bears get more com-

fortable on the field and hopefully make strides as the season progresses.

Heading into District 3-A, the Bears are joined by CSLA, McMinn Central, Sweetwater and Tyner Academy.

Tellico opens district play on March 20 against McMinn Central while clashing with Sweetwater on April 21.

CSLA, the defending District 3-A Champion, comes to Tellico on April 7, with Tyner Academy hosting the Bears on April 9.

CSLA and Tyner Academy represented the district in the region tournament last season, with CSLA advancing to the Class A Sectionals.

Tellico will also travel to Sequoyah, Maryville Christian and William Blount this spring.

The Bears will host Sale Creek on April 13 and Chattanooga Central on April 23 — the final home game of the season.

Flag Football

Continued from Page 2

is what Cardin described as an “explosive” athlete and she scored the Lady Cherokees’ program-first touchdown at running back. Bentley Gardner, a freshman, is also a versatile offensive threat who can play a variety of positions and Cardin is still trying to find the best one for her.

Kirra Collins, a junior, and Bella Haren, a sophomore, are the starting receivers and have scored touchdowns in scrimmages.

Haylee Garringer, a junior, dressed out for the boys’ football team this past fall and, as a result, Cardin said “she probably has a little higher football IQ than a lot of the girls on the team because this is so new to everybody.”

Nevaeh Funderburk is the lone starting senior, at center, and Cardin called her “probably one of the most irreplaceable players that we’ve got at this moment.”

Rounding out the roster are seniors Kataruh Mills and Tilee McDermott, juniors Ashton McDermott, Tiara Ocampo, Maddy Greene and Ansley Jenkins, sophomores Katie Crockett, JoJo Crain, Tori Gentry, Kylie Crockett and Blair Prince and freshmen Kylee Lankford, Katana Brown, Breanna Huston, Bella Bailey, Paisley Moses and Maddie Dicken.

Competition ramps up in a hurry for McMinn after its impressive season opener. The Lady Cherokees are the only first-year program in their Region 2-AA. The other schools in the

region – Walker Valley, Bradley Central, Cleveland, East Hamilton, Ooltewah, Soddy-Daisy and Howard – have had a program for at least one full year already. McMinn’s first season coincides with the first year that flag football is a fully sanctioned TSSAA sport. In previous seasons, flag football was classified as an emergent sport.

Walker Valley appears to be the favorite in the region, having come off last year’s finish in the state invitational tournament’s semifinals and a 19-1 record.

With McMinn being a new program, Cardin expects everyone involved, himself included, to make mistakes while learning as they go along.

“Being brand new, it is hard to have ‘expectations,’” Cardin said. “We are the only first-year team in our region so we have a lot to learn. We will make mistakes. I will make mistakes. But my expectation is that we do not repeat our mistakes; that we get better each game. We will learn from every game. My expectation is that we play hard and get better because that has nothing to do with who is playing against us on the other side of the ball.”

McMinn played its first region game March 12 at Rhea and it is back in action March 24 in Chattanooga against East Ridge and Red Bank before coming home March 26 against region opponent Soddy-Daisy.



McMinn County Cherokees



Lady Cherokee Softball		
3/3	Rhea County	A 6:00
3/4	Walker Valley	A 5:30
3/5	Bearden	A 6:00
3/12	Oak Ridge	A 6:00
3/23	Bradley Central	H 5:00
3/26	Rhea County	H 6:00
3/27	Sequoyah	H 6:00
3/30	Bearden	H 6:00
3/31	Hardin Valley	A 6:00
4/2	Oak Ridge	H 6:00
4/6	Farragut	H 6:00
4/7	Lenoir City	A 6:00
4/9	Farragut	A 6:00
4/13	Walker Valley	H 5:30
4/14	Lenoir City	H 6:00
4/20	Cleveland	A 5:30
4/21	Hardin Valley	H 6:00
4/23	Bradley Central	A 5:00
4/27	Sequoyah	A 5:30
4/30	McMinn Central	A 5:30

Boys Track & Field		
2/28	Rhea Co Time Trial	A 11:00 AM
3/6	Loudon Meet #1	A 5:00 PM
3/11	Howard Tech Meet #1	A 3:30 PM
3/27	Loudon Meet #2	A 5:00 AM
3/31	Walker Valley Meet #2	A 4:00 PM
4/3	Lee Univ Invit.	A 9:30 AM
4/7	Soddy-Daisy Stan	A 4:00 PM
4/9	Red Bank Meet #2	A 4:00 PM
4/16	McMinn Co Meet	H 3:30 PM
4/21	McMinn Central	A 4:30 PM
4/28	Sub Sec/Dist Rhea	A 10:00 AM
5/5	Sec @ Cookeville	A 9:00 AM
5/19	DI-AAA St Champ	A 9:00 AM

Baseball		
3/2	Walker Valley	A 4:00 7:00
3/4	Walker Valley	A 4:00 7:00
3/5	Ooltewah	A 4:30 7:00
3/9	Oak Ridge	A 6:00
3/11	Oak Ridge	H 6:00
3/16-19	Panama City	A TBA
3/23	Rhea County	H 4:00 7:00
3/24	Rhea County	A 4:00 7:00
3/26	Cleveland	H 4:00 7:00
3/27	Cleveland	A 4:00 7:00
3/30	Bearden	A 6:00
4/1	Bearden	H 6:00
4/3-4	Sweetwater Tourn.	TBA
4/6	Harden Valley	H 6:00
4/8	Harden Valley	A 6:30
4/13	Farragut	A 6:30
4/15	Farragut	H 6:30
4/16	Boyd Buchanan	H 4:00 7:00
4/17	Red Bank	H 6:00
4/20	Lenoir City	H 6:30
4/22	Lenoir City	A 6:30
4/24	McCallie	A 6:00
4/27	Ooltewah	H 4:30 7:00
4/29-5/6	District Tournament	
** District Opponents		

Soccer		
3/5	Cleveland Classic	A TBA
3/6	Cleveland Classic	A TBA
3/7	Cleveland Classic	A TBA
3/10	Ooltewah	H 5:00 7:00
3/12	Collegedale Prep	A 5:00 7:00
3/25	Cleveland	A TBA 6:00
3/31	Rhea County	H 5:00 7:00
4/2	Walker Valley	H 5:00 7:00
4/7	East Hamilton	H 5:00 7:00
4/8	Sweetwater	A 1:00
4/14	Cleveland	H TBA 6:00
4/16	Rhea County	A 5:00 7:00
4/22	Walker Valley	A 5:00 7:00
4/24	Silverdale	H 6:00
4/30	Bradley	A 6:00 TBA

Tennis		
3/7	Fairfield Tourn	A 12:00 PM
3/3	Ooltewah	H 4:00
3/5	Bradley	H 4:15
3/10	Ooltewah	A 4:00
3/12	Soddy Daisy	A 4:15
3/13	Tournament	A TBA
3/24	Cleveland	H 4:15
3/26	Rhea County	A 4:15
3/30	East Hamilton	A 4:00
3/31	Walker Valley	H 4:15
4/6	Bradley	A 4:15
4/7	Rhea County	H 4:15
4/9	Walker Valley	A 4:15
4/13	East Hamilton	H 4:00
4/17	Soddy Daisy	H 4:00
4/20-23	End of Yr Tourn.	TBA TBA
4/27	District Tourn.	TBA TBA
4/28	District Tourn.	TBA TBA
4/20	Girls Team Reg.	TBA TBA
5/1	Boys Team Reg.	TBA TBA
5/4	Individual Reg.	TBA TBA
5/5	Individual Reg.	TBA TBA
5/7	Girls Sectionals	TBA TBA
5/8	Boys Sectionals	TBA TBA
5/12-15	State Tourn.	TBA TBA



LOCAL BANKING
YOU DESERVE

CNB Athens Branch

1305 Decatur Pike | 423-381-8270

CITIZENS
NATIONAL
BANK

MEMBER FDIC
Proudly Serving Our Communities
CNBTN.com

Sweetwater veteran roster brings proven athletes to the track

Sweetwater track and field brings a roster this spring that is loaded with proven athletes and touts a high upperclassmen presence for the 2026 season.

The Wildcats and Lady Wildcats roster 24 athletes — 16 of those are juniors or seniors, making two-thirds of the team upperclassmen, which is something that helps serve the program in a sport that can have athletes working solo in certain situations.

“It is like an individual sport, but it is a team sport. It helps build the kids by showing them discipline and how to do things on their own,” Sweetwater coach Chad Grabowski said. “The discipline is big and the older members do a good job of making sure it is followed or taken care of.”

Several of those athletes return from previous teams — including McCade Frye and Isaiah Stiles, who have competed in previous Class A State Championships.

It also features volleyball standout Peyton Grabowski and football standouts Ty Fitch and Jeremiah Parris.

“Isaiah has his jumping ability and Ty wants to work on his speed for football. Then there are other people like McCade who wants to do cross country and track in college,” Grabowski added. “As a senior, he is working real hard.”

More returners join the group, like Si McCosh and Kamyah McBee. Peyton Grabowski helps represent the new faces, alongside Corbin Nile and Henry Frerichs.

“It is great to have Si, Ty, Peyton, McCade and more. They are the ones that set the standard of what we are looking for from the team members and how they should be performing at practice or events,” Chad Grabowski said. “They are putting in the extra work and it shows the young kids that if you want to be good at your sports or events, you need to put in the work and it pays off.”

Frye has represented Sweetwater in the past two Class A State Championships. The senior placed fourth in last year’s 3200-meter run with a time of 10:10.541.

As a sophomore, Frye placed seventh in the 1600-meter run with a time of 4:48.366.

“It is nice to have a guy like that. It is a good example for everybody else; they see him putting in the work and it pays off when he does his events,” Grabowski said.

Frye has already set a new school record this spring. At the Tennova Farragut East

Tennessee Jamboree, Frye ran a 4:28.61 time in the boys’ 1600m.

He also holds the record in the boys’ 3200m with a 9:44.85 at the Volunteer Track Classic last April.

Stiles made the trip to Murfreesboro last spring, placing fifth in the high jump with a clearance of 6-00 on his second attempt.

At the last chance qualifier in late April 2025, Stiles set the school record in the boys’ high jump, clearing 6-02.

McCosh will run in the 400m for the Wildcats, with Fitch looking to compete in the 100m and 200m.

The two will join Parris and Stiles in the 4x100m relay.

Parker Willett will join Frerichs, Frye and McCosh in the 4x400m relay.

Lamariana Griffin and McBee look to run in multiple events with the Lady Wildcats.

Grabowski has also set a school record this year in the girls’ high jump with a clearance of 4-00 at the jamboree.

Junior Lydia Arwood has competed well in the shot put and discus.

“Starting off from where she was last year, she just keeps improving.

She is a hard worker,” Chad Grabowski said.

Elijah Johnson and Nile will also throw for the Wildcats this spring. Johnson nearly hit the 100-foot mark in the discus.

“Discus is a technique thing and he does a real good job in technique,” Grabowski added.

Sweetwater’s roster is full of

multi-sport athletes.

“There is so much cross-training that carries over to the sports that they are noted for, that those same skills are needed in track. But they are also able to continue developing,” Sweetwater assistant coach Amber Grabowski said. “It also makes them noticeable in more areas. So many college coaches are crossover athletes, so that just makes them more versatile.”

An example of that comes from Fitch, the Sweetwater running back named the 2025 All-County Offensive Player of the Year, who has spent the offseason diligent working on his running form.

“We are really excited to be able to work with the track team. These athletes are eager to learn and they have been really thriving in practice and trying to take it all in,” Amber Grabowski added. “They are setting goals for themselves and that is exciting to see, too.”

Show Your School Spirit!







Order a debit card to support your local schools.



www.PBET.bank

Member FDIC



Tellico growth sets up hope for 2026 season

Tellico Plains was young last year, something that has this team coming into stride ahead of the 2026 season.

It also has a roster that is pretty well balanced with five seniors, five juniors, five sophomores and four freshmen.

“We are already seeing the effect of so many of last year’s freshmen playing so many innings. Now we have good chemistry going so far and playing pretty clean defense — knock on wood,” Tellico Plains coach Chris Hollinghead said. “The team chemistry is pretty good for where we are now and offensive production has been pretty good.”

The way the underclassmen have settled on the field could be the defining factor of this year’s team.

“We kind of hoped it would work out this way last year. We talked about how every inning was an investment. I don’t really look at them as sophomores, I look at them as upperclassmen because, playing-wise, they have got enough to qualify,” Hollinghead added.

Sophomore John Broad returns after pitching 40 innings last year, allowing just 69 hits on 237 batters faced and striking out 31.

“Right now, John is picking up right where he left off and is a stud on the mound,” Hollinghead said. “When you have a pitcher that consistently puts batters in a tough spot, it just builds confidence in our whole team.”

Also returning to the team is Rylan Woods, who was with the basketball team deep in the postseason.

Woods pitched 24 innings last year, allowing only 11 earned runs and 24 hits with 26 strikeouts. Junior Cayden Smith saw 31.1 innings last year.

“We know what we have got with Woods. He is not going to be a surprise to anyone,” Hollinghead said.



Courtesy of Danielle Proulx

Cole Dodson is a sophomore who has had a fantastic summer and travel ball season.

“He has grown a lot in the offseason. He is bigger and he is stronger,” Hollinghead added.

Some of Tellico’s greatest experience is behind the plate. Senior Dawson Edwards caught 126.2 innings last season, catching nine stealing and picking off two runners.

“He is the dude. He is the glue and is the quarterback. He has a big role on our team and he serves it well,” Hollinghead said. “I may be biased, but I think we have the best catcher in the district. I look for him to have a big season.”

Returners Ike Hollinghead and Rylan Saffles will also bring strength in the middle infield. Ike Hollinghead, named the team’s defensive player of the year last spring, moves to second base with Saffles returning to shortstop.

“Ike and Rylan have really amped up the chemistry there and locked up the middle infield. They are pretty smooth together,” Chris Hollinghead said.

Senior Will Sanders is playing at a high level as he returns to

third base. Broad is taking over first base, a spot he has played over the summer.

When Broad is on the mound, Tellico has several options like Kirkland, Smith, Woods and freshman Rylee Smith.

Tellico also fields one of the fastest outfielders in the area with the trio of Caden McConkey, Colt Cooper and Gio Carter.

“We have got quite a few outfielders, but those starters, I would put them up against any outfielders — speed-wise, reading fly balls, making good decisions with the balls and hitting the cut-off man,” Hollinghead said.

Cooper is a leader in the outfield as a sophomore at center field.

“He positions the outfield in really good spots that I am pleased with and he tracks a fly ball better than anybody,” Hollinghead said.

Carter has a quick jump as a fast left fielder. McConkey brings a strong arm and determination to right field.

“Those boys have worked hard on it and it seems to be paying off,” Hollinghead said.

Tellico’s lineup batted .284 as a team last year with 150 RBIs,

175 hits and 193 runs scored. The Bears return seven batters who hit .262 or above in 2025, including Broad’s .400 and McJunkin’s .333.

“They see the ball well, they make good decisions and they hit hittable pitches for the most part,” Hollinghead said. “We are a good offensive team so far.”

Edwards is swinging well and bats lead off. Saffles has moved into the third spot and has already homered in 2026.

“He has gotten stronger and has the potential to really have a breakout season at the plate,” Hollinghead said.

Sanders batted above .200 as a freshman and had a terrific summer in the cage. Ike Hollinghead moves into the second spot.

“(Sanders) tweaked some things and it has paid off. He has been destroying the baseball so far,” Chris Hollinghead said. “He has worked his tail off and he has not missed a beat baseball-wise. His confidence is way high and he has been producing.”

Tellico’s four freshmen — Micah Dyer, Maverick Shaw, Nolan Woods and Smith — factor into the team’s depth as well.

McMinn track returns most production from 2025; seeks to send more to state

McMinn County has one athlete headed to the next level and another with a state tournament appearance under his belt.

And head track and field coach Tony Murdic is looking for several more to garner those accolades in what he says is a talented Cherokee unit for the 2026 season.

"I'm fortunate enough to have all of my veterans back with us this year," Murdic said. "I really do think we can go deep into regionals. At regionals, they only take the top four on, but I'm hoping we can get several in. When you get to that meet, anything can happen and all of our athletes have the potential to get to Murfreesboro. Hopefully and preferably, we can get a large quantity there to regionals and maybe spring some upsets and go to Murfreesboro."

Murdic first mentioned star Winston Coffey as a key leader of the Tribe program. Coffey, who excels in the 200 meter sprint, signed with Tennessee Wesleyan in February.

"Winston is a great asset for our team. Just a great team player," Murdic said.

Another senior leader is Jakyran "Peanut" Dyer, a football star at running back but also a lightning fast track star. Dyer mainly specializes in the 100 meter dash, but he anchors the Tribe 4x100 team as well.

"I have great expectations for Mr. Dyer," Murdic said.

Lincoln Watson, a junior, has come along for the Tribe track program into an integral piece, per Murdic.

"Lincoln has come a long way for us as far



as track purposes," Murdic said. "Last year, he ran the 400 for us, but he's improved his speed so much that I'm going to plug him in to the 100 and 200 meters and I think he could win some points for us."

In the field, Murdic said Christian Edwards will be key in the discus. Last season, Edwards had a person record (PR) of 105 feet in that category.

And Clark Nation, who advanced to the state championships in triple jump in 2024 before an injury last season, hopes to get back to state in 2026.

"Clark is probably the most talented guy we have on the track and field team," Murdic said. "I'm looking forward to him coming back and getting in the triple jump and maybe going back the big stage."

Murdic also mentioned senior Josiah Dyer as having the potential to go to state in the long jump. He jumped over 19 feet last season, per Murdic.

In distance running, senior Nehemiah

Jackson and sophomore Lennon Solsbee have great potential to have success, per Murdic.

Also listed on the McMinn boys track and field roster – Walter Alexander, Bryce Cagle, Cam Green, Miles Hughes, Jesse Jones, Carson McDaniel, Makye McDermott, Nate White and James Ziegler.

On the girls side, Murdic said the strength is his throwers.

"I've got two freshman that have shown great potential for us – Katana Brown, a freshman, went to state last year in middle school in the discus and shot, so I'm looking for big things from her," he said.

Murdic talked about Daviana Orr, who is key in shot and discus, and Rachel Alexander, Nevaeh Johnson and Gizelle Robles.

"All those young ladies have shown promise and have won the most points of meets we've had early in the season," he noted.

As for runners, Murdic said Tilee and Ashton McDermott are excellent sprinters.

"We've also got Tara Mills, who specializes in the 200 meters and one of the legs of our 4x100 relay team," he said.

Katie and Kylie Crockett will run, too, with Katie in the 100 and 200 and Kylie in the 100 and 300 meter hurdles.

"And then Mina Kuwrowski – Mina is a great tennis player, but I'll tell you what, she's actually a 200 meter and a 400 meter specialist. She's just got the gift for the middle distance."

Overall, Murdic said all of his runners and field participants are working hard and he's excited for the season.

SQ Track

Continued from Page 15

"Both of those guys, I am looking to see big things out of this year," Schrimsher said.

Stallcup represented Sequoyah in sectionals last year.

"I think he is going to be taking some big strides this year and we are going to be looking better at that," Schrimsher added.

Sequoyah will see multiple athletes throwing this spring. Caden Atkins, Kaden McKeown, Addison Martin and Tracy Weidner will throw in discus and shot put.

Martin, a freshman, represented Madisonville Middle in the TMSAA State

Championship last year.

"She looks great and has thrown as far as she did last year with a new weight. We are really excited to see her get out there as a freshman," Schrimsher said. "I see her winning events as a freshman, which will be awesome."

Martin placed third in the TMSAA 1A girls' shot put with a 33-1.50 throw while placing fifth in the discus with a 77-9.00 throw.

Weidner, a senior, is coming off a solid year of development, while Atkins and McKeown have also made tremendous progress.

"(Weidner) has gotten a lot better over the offseason," Schrimsher said. "They have gotten significantly better."

While across the board the team has hopes of representing the school in sectionals and state championships, the program has also focused on individual goals.

"We do a lot of conversations about personal bests and trying to set that — that comes first," Schrimsher said. "Then we start looking at exterior goals. We have to hit a certain goal to qualify for sectionals, so we are looking for that."

Large numbers lead to large expectations for Central track, field

Turnout for McMinn Central track and field is high this spring, and so are expectations for what it can accomplish.

The rosters for Central number 29 boys and 14 girls, with some of the 17 freshmen combined between the two already having had competitive experience with the successful McMinn East middle school program that feeds into Central.

“We have a lot of people out this year for track,” said Central head coach Shannon Goodin. “We are excited about the turnout. Some of these kids have come up through the ranks of our middle school program, so they have been working with us for almost three years now.”

Central graduated five seniors from last year, including two-time TSSAA state champion McCary Beaty, now a freshman at Western Carolina. Central is also coming off a 2025 season in which it had a few injuries, with Beaty among them – but she had still made the TSSAA Spring Fling and finished fourth there in the 300 hurdles despite a quad strain that sidelined her most of the regular season.

“Last year was a crazy year,” Goodin said. “We suffered a few injuries – some were able to come back, some were not. We graduated five seniors this last year and we have a few seniors that are returning.”

Now it is time for some returning athletes to shine for Central, starting with the two senior captains, Jake Goodin and Jeb Goodin.

Jake Goodin is coming off a junior season of track that was abbreviated by a knee injury he had sustained in football and he participated only in two late meets, including running the 4x100 relay in the East Sectional. But Jake Goodin looks poised to be the Central boys’ lead sprinter and jumper this season.

“He has worked hard in offseason, ready to get back out on the track,” Shannon Goodin said of Jake. “He is a competitor, whom we will rely heavily on for one of our top sprinters. We look for big things from Jake.”

Jeb Goodin, cousin of Jake, is also back after missing last season from ACL surgery in the fall, and his specialty is the throwing events.

“He has been working hard in the offseason, throwing every chance he gets,” Shannon Goodin said of Jeb. “He has been a huge leader in our throws community. He works with the new throwers on technique and helps lead practices. Jeb is our hype man. He gets everyone started at practice, with the warm up lap, and then leads them through the stretches and mobility exercises. The kids really respond well to him.”

John Mazzei, also a senior, is looking to emerge in the 400-meter dash this season, and he has also picked up the 800.

On the girls’ side, senior Anna Natter, who is coming off a run to the state meet in swimming, is out for track for her first time this year. Natter looks to compete in shot put and sprints.

“We are taking that strength from swimming and that endurance and we’re gonna use it to hopefully promote her in the shot put and sprints division,” Goodin said of Natter. “She is very willing and eager to learn and a quick study. We are excited to have her with us this year.”

Other returning boys’ distance runners who could make an impact are junior Keller Grueber, who had previously reached the sectional in the 1600, as well as juniors William Pangle and Eli Coggins.

Gunner Goodin, a sophomore and younger brother of Jeb, could be headed for a breakout season in the throws.

“He has made great progress over the summer and the offseason, and we look for him to be a place center and competitor within our section,” said Shannon Goodin of Gunner.

Among the newcomers, freshman Brady Carroll is coming off a state meet cross country season and looks to be an immediate threat in the distance events, with the 3200 his specialty. Carroll will run the 1600 occasionally as well. Carroll set records in relays and distance events for the middle school program.

Goodin expects that several freshmen could end up making noise by the time the postseason comes.

“Also some of our newcomers include several of our former middle school athletes that have made great strides and will continue to help build our track team into a competitor in our section,” Goodin said. “We are very young, but they are very eager and very competitive and that is exciting to see as a coach.”

Rounding out the boys’ roster are seniors Zymari Clary and Bradley Mayfield; juniors Jemiah Lenoir, William Mayfield, Keyshawn Moore, Jamez Moss and Taylan Moss; sophomores Maddux Bartel, Caden Duncan, Derrick Moore and Ayden Nevins; and freshmen Tucker Carr, Josh Collier, Brice Freeman, Daniel Kelly, Rylan Killebrew, Aadonis Lamb, Devin Lightfoot, Brayden Natola, Camden Nichols and Eli Stanford.

Rounding out the girls’ roster are seniors Rosa Augustin Andres, Carina Franco and Mirra Freeman; juniors Grace Collier and Te’ojah Lowary; sophomores Millie Latham and Ava Nevins; and freshmen Abigail Birchfield, Jessi Cole, Willow Dougherty, Lucero Franco, Sydney Martin and Cadence Peterson.



Courtesy of Shannon Goodin

With plenty of talent, experience, Sweetwater ready for 2026

As Sweetwater heads into a new season, the Wildcats' roster is as competitive as ever.

Plenty of talented athletes return to a team that has made three consecutive appearances in the Class 2A state tournament, while a new coach has the group settling in ahead of the year.

Sweetwater did graduate key contributors from the program's success — Cooper Davies, Cade Houser, Jayden Richesin and Lucas Rockholt — but a team that saw plenty of success from the bulk of sophomores and freshmen in 2025 are more experienced.

"The experience is a huge strength but, at the same time, it can also be a negative," Sweetwater coach Blake Cosner said. "With that experience, they are already comfortable with any situation in a game. What I am talking about is a little more push when we go down by one or tied late in a game, they are comfortable with it because they have been there before."

The mound has plenty of experience. Bryson Bonnough, Ashton Brown, Bryson Burgess, Kolt Correll, Ryder Scott and Will Watson return 206 innings pitched.

Brown started the season against Knoxville West, showing well against a talented team. Burgess returns after leading the team with 61 innings and with a 2.05 ERA.

"Burgess is one of those guys where it seems he is just Mr. Consistency," Cosner said.

Bonnough has made great strides in the offseason ahead of his sophomore season, while Ryder Scott will add more depth to his 18 innings last spring.

"(Bonnough) has looked really well off the rubber," Cosner said. "Ryder has had a really good pre-season. He seems like he is healthy, which is a huge thing for us."

As a freshman, Watson pitched key innings in the state tournament. He pitched in the preseason at CAK despite taking over a different role in the preseason.



Courtesy of Tommy Botello

"He may be a little behind our other guys from the mound perspective due to the sacrifice he made in catching bullpens for us," Cosner said.

Correll also saw the mound at CAK. Boston Montooth, who did not play last year, is also adding to the long list of options.

"He has looked really well and he ate up some really big innings in Coalfield right there," Cosner said.

The amount of pitchers — and management of pitchers — has been a key strength for the Wildcats in the past and is setting up to continue that trend.

Behind the plate, Gus Campbell is taking over the role at catcher. He has worked with the staff and Houser on that job. Landon Dacus adds to the depth.

"Gus is a competitor. If I asked him to run through a wall, he would ask me how many times does he have to do it," Cosner said. "That is the attitude he has and I love him for it. He has done well and he is learning the game as he goes."

Another player with a new job is Nolan Dacus. After playing as a designated hitter for most of his time, the junior has been playing at first base.

"He has kind of taken the role of predominantly playing first base. It is a learning curve for anybody," Cosner said.

Nolan Dacus is in the process of rehabbing a knee injury that has affected his potential impact behind the plate or in the outfield.

"He is going to give you max effort no matter where he is at," Cosner said.

The infield sees movement amongst players like Bonnough, Brown, Burgess and Watson.

"It is still a shuffling game right now and probably always will be in 2A baseball. At the end of the day, they are still baseball players. They are comfortable," Cosner said. "They are comfortable playing all of them. The ball is going to come off the bat, you are going to field it and throw it to first base."

"Irrelevant where you are playing

on the field, it is just a lineup and knowing where you have to be in certain situations."

Jaxson Powell and Creed Ramsey return to the team after appearing off the bench last season, helping to hold down left and right fields.

Sweetwater batted .256 last year and returns 146 hits. Somewhat new to the lineup this spring is Riley Twilbeck, a senior who did not play last spring.

"Riley is a great kid and he works hard. I have been very honest with him and we see eye-to-eye," Cosner said. "That DH role is his for the taking. As long as he takes that aggressive approach, he is doing fantastic."

In the first two games, Sweetwater is batting .241 with 13 hits and 13 runs scored.

"Against Stone Memorial, we were aggressive without discipline versus aggressive with discipline. We gave away some at-bats and that is tough to learn for some guys," Cosner said. "We probably took

SW Baseball

Continued from Page 25

nine or 10 bad swings in the whole game. The problem is, those nine or 10 swings went fair. You do that, you give away three innings of baseball.”

Against West, the bats were hot from the start. In the Stone Memorial win, the bats were caught later.

“That is the thing about us, they are wanting to produce so bad that they are swinging at some bad pitches here and there,” Cosner said. “The more at-bats they get, the more pitches they see, the more comfortable they get with themselves and me.”

Meigs Softball

Continued from Page 14



the playing time alongside Snyder, while sophomores Mercy Fowler and Carly Sneed will also see significant action. Armour and Long can also play in the infield, as can fellow freshmen Addeline Henry and Mollie Grubb.

Meigs began the season immediately in the deep end of the pool, facing defending District II-A state champion Silverdale on the road in its season opener as well as formidable competition from Girls Preparatory School and Ooltewah in the Tiger Classic.

The Lady Tigers even got a sneak preview of one of their district opponents in the Tiger Classic, beating Tellico Plains in dramatic fashion for their first win of the Neely era.

Meigs begins District 3-2A play March 19 at home against Sweetwater.

TP Track

Continued from Page 5

Malerie Wiseman enters as one of the top throwers in the state. The junior placed fifth in the Class A State Championship last spring with a 94-11 in her final throw.

“Of the returning discus throwers, she is No. 2. There is a senior from another school that is ahead of her,” Wiseman said. “We have worked really hard with her over the year and we are hoping we can compete with her at the end of the year.”

Malerie Wiseman threw over the winter in indoor track. She started her spring season plac-

ing first in the discus at the Tennova Farragut East Tennessee Jamboree with a 99-9 mark.

She also placed second in the shot put with a 29-4.

“It is just seeing where she goes and how she does. She has worked hard to try to get back and represent,” Chris Wiseman added.

For Tellico, the more competing and settling in will help the spring take place.

Wiseman shared a story of his daughter, Darrah, not originally wanting to compete in the 800m.

After running in it for the first time “it turned out to be her favorite event,” Chris Wiseman said.

It was her most successful, winning three state championships in it, showing the results of being willing.

“You just go out there and see what happens,” Chris Wiseman said. “We only have about a dozen or so kids, but we are pretty good. We are small, which is fine. That way, we can focus more on honing and what to do better if they want to get better.”

TP Softball

Continued from Page 13

and played pretty well.”

Day returns a .543 average with 44 hits and three home runs from 2025. Tellico also gets averages in the high .300s back from Moses and Joines, who combined for 45 hits.

Woods and Ziglar also return after batting

above .200 as juniors.

The Tellico team batted .280 last season with 167 hits, 11 home runs and 111 runs scored.

Joines and Wright return three home runs, with Moses and Ziglar hitting one each.

Tellico was one win away from reaching

the Region 2-2A tournament last spring, falling 6-1 in an elimination game at Sweetwater. The Lady Bears will hope to reach the District 3-2A Championship in a league that will be challenging — featuring Kingston, McMinn Central, Meigs County and Sweetwater.



Scores, Schedules, and Stories

Subscribe today for the scoop on
School Sports, Pro Games and more!

Check out our website for all the latest local news. Sign up for our E-Newsletter and get the news delivered straight to your inbox!

The Daily Post Athenian

DailyPostAthenian.com

Athens, TN
423-745-5664

The Advocate & Democrat

AdvocateandDemocrat.com

Sweetwater, TN
423-337-7101

Local ADVERTISING

That Works as Hard as You Do

Along with offering the most robust print advertising solutions in McMinn County, The Daily Post Athenian also offers a wide range of digital advertising including Targeted Display, Geofencing, Social Media, Streaming Video, Targeted Email and lots more!

Call or email today about the best locally focused print, digital and specialized advertising solutions to fit your business!



Sharon Livingston

General Manager

📞 **Direct: 423-252-1213**
 📧 sharon.livingston@advocateanddemocrat.com
 🌐 www.dailypostathenian.com
 🌐 www.advocateanddemocrat.com
 🌐 www.rheaheraldnews.com

The Daily-Post Athenian
The Advocate & Democrat
The Herald News



Angela Alvarez

Print & Digital Solutions

📞 **Cell: 423-252-9940**
 📧 angela.alvarez@dailypostathenian.com
 📍 416 S. White St. | Athens, TN 37303
 🌐 www.dailypostathenian.com

The Daily-Post
Athenian



Tina Huckabey

Print & Digital Solutions

📞 **Cell: 423-506-3652**
 📧 tina.huckabey@dailypostathenian.com
 📍 416 S. White St. | Athens, TN 37303
 🌐 www.dailypostathenian.com

The Daily-Post
Athenian



Kelly Gentry

Print & Digital Solutions

📞 **Cell: 423-506-3652**
 📧 kelly.gentry@advocateanddemocrat.com
 📍 416 S. White St. | Athens, TN 37303
 🌐 www.advocateanddemocrat.com

Offering a wide range of digital advertising including Targeted Display, Geofencing, Social Media, Streaming Video, Targeted Email, Website Upgrades and lots more.

The Advocate & Democrat



Rebecca Hjulberg

Inside Sales Executive

📞 **Direct: 423-252-1208**
 📧 rebecca.hjulberg@dailypostathenian.com
 🌐 www.advocateanddemocrat.com
 🌐 www.dailypostathenian.com

• **Classified Advertising** • **Coloring Contest**
 • **Service Directory** • **Legal Notices**
 • **Small Space Advertising** • **Obituary Services**
 • **Themed Pages**and More!

The Daily-Post Athenian
The Advocate & Democrat

McMinn County

The Daily Post Athenian

Monroe County

The Advocate & Democrat