

2025-2026 SSR Basketball Season Review

The Shoals entered the 2025-2026 season coming off an impressive showing at the Final Four in 2025. You had Florence boys coming off a runner-up finish, and Mars Hill boys finished runner-up as well in 2025. Then you had Lauderdale County girls, coming off a comeback win, winning the state championship. However, this season would have ups and downs for all three of those programs and the entire area.

November

We began our coverage at Mae Jemison, seeing a new look Florence boys team start their season with 7A powerhouse Huntsville. Now, at the same time, a lot of schools were waiting for football to finish or taking a week or two extra to practice. Florence would come up short, but it was a solid test to see where they were. One early highlight from November was Belle Hill posting a 45-point, 16-rebound, 11-steal triple-double in a win over a 3A Mississippi team, Our Lady Academy.

The Wilson boys would take a trip that would make memories for a lifetime. They traveled to Knightstown, Indiana, to play Section (AL) at the gym Hoosiers was filmed. They would come up short, but were in the game the whole time. They played Section because you have to find your opponent to play up there. Coach Corey Krieger would potentially answer any questions about how to get the planning started. We did a story on this. [Linked here](#). Then we entered Thanksgiving week where nearly everywhere you looked there was a tournament going on.

November was a solid month locally. You have to take it with a grain of salt, as it is a mixed bag with teams coming off football on the boys' side and the girls' side, and you are potentially playing tougher competition in tournaments.

December

The calendar turned to December, and Christmas was everywhere, but area play would get underway before Christmas. December 2nd was a solid night locally. Rylan Pettus gave an early bright spot for Shoals Christian, scoring a career-high 44 points to win their first game since the 2024 Sweet Sixteen. He also nailed a shot at the buzzer to beat Hackleburg in overtime. The same night, we saw some other highlights as Deshler won a thriller at Lauderdale County in a matchup of what would be two final four boys teams. Florence boys got their first win over Muscle Shoals, which was the last team to begin play after football made the semifinals.

Wilson would spoil the festivities for Hatton's new gym opening on December 5th. Noah Hetrick scored all of his 15 points on three-pointers. James Mallette shot 73%. Wilson boys ended the third quarter on a 15-0 run to lead 45-30 and essentially put the game out of reach.

December 9th, Deshler traveled to Central for an area game. During the girls' game, Reece Davis (junior, Deshler) surpassed 2000 career points. She is well on her way to breaking the school scoring record of 2830 points currently held by Chloe Siegel. Reece ended the season at 2726 points. In a stunner, Central boys beat Deshler later that night by three in a result that would have a long-term impact. Deshler girls would hand Wilson their first loss later that week by four points.

The Brooks and Deshler boys have become a fun rivalry on the court in the last couple of years. They also provided an exciting finish on December 15th. Miles Warren had 5.6 seconds in a tie game; he would go the length of the floor to beat Deshler at home. He went 13-14 on free throws in that game, as well as Tanner Bowens having 24 points, which was a new career-high. Brooks could only celebrate for a few days, as they would go to Central on December 19th, and Cole Wilcoxson banked a three-pointer at the buzzer to beat Brooks.

One of the more fun rivalries is Central-Wilson. Central girls handed Wilson their second loss of the season just before Christmas. Wilson boys repaid Central by splitting the nightcap as Wilson continued their early-season success. The season would take a brief two-day break for Christmas before the post-Christmas tournaments began.

Lauderdale County girls entered Christmas Day at 8-3. They would enter the new year at 8-6 before falling to 8-7. Losing games to South Gibson (TN), Loretto (TN), Florence, and Priceville.

Reece Davis had 46 points on 8-10 from three-pointers in a win over Southside-Gadsden during the break.

January

The Hatton boys spoiled the New Year festivities at Deshler by beating Deshler 69-68 sinking Deshler boys to their third area loss. That same night, Kacie Nelson had 34 points in a new career-high vs Hatton in the girls' game. Garrett Reid notched a career-high 36 points, scoring the first 18 points of the third quarter for Deshler to give them a two-point lead after trailing by five at halftime.

One of the most anticipated but short-notice games was Mars Hill girls versus Deshler girls on January 10th. Deshler got the comeback win, but Belle Hill had 32 points while Reece Davis had 34 points. The same night, Lauderdale County would have its skills competition at Wilson before the County Tournament began. Isla Hardy (Central girls) and Miles Warren (Brooks boys) won the three-point contests. Will White (Lexington) defeated Hazi Spearman in the one-on-one finals.

The Lauderdale County tournament brought some career-highlights. Central's Jill Huffaker and Isla Hardy had career-high's on back-to-back nights, Huffaker 25 versus Waterloo in a win, Hardy 27 versus Wilson in a loss. Career-highs became contagious as Madison Mobley had 25 in a win over Lexington the same night Hardy had 27.

January brings area games with more intensity because they mean things such as seeding and hosting privileges. Deshler boys would beat Wilson in overtime at Deshler, but the 4A boys area tournament would be at Brooks. After snow and ice came and went, we would get to February while the weather tries to heat up. The action on the court would heat up as well.

Playoffs

We start the playoffs at Brooks with the 4A boys area tournament. Central beat Wilson in a close game that added more fuel to the rivalry. Deshler would begin a final four run that no one outside the locker room expected. Muscle Shoals got tested by Athens in the first round at home but held on to win by three. Wilson held off Hatton to win and advance to sub-regionals. That is all the drama in the area tournament as we move to sub-regionals, where it would be win or go home.

In a fun local matchup, we saw Colbert County at Mars Hill on both the girls' and boys' sides. Mars Hill boys were under .500 all season, but had played a schedule that was full of 4A-7A opponents. Mars Hill would sweep Colbert County.

The highlight on the girls' side would be Wilson. Who had come up short of regionals last season. They would win in sub-regionals this season, beating Haleyville 40-36 and surviving Haleyville's stall-ball tactics with no shot clock. The game was tied at 29 at halftime, and Wilson led 35-33 with 1:30 left in the third quarter. Haleyville then decided to hold the ball for the quarter and take a three-pointer to make it 36-35 at the end of the third. Coach Eric Oakley (Wilson) said we can do that too, and began to hold the ball. It was 40-38 Wilson with 3:08 left in the game. It would end with that score as the final.

The Deshler boys had to fight against Fayette County to win and advance. Garrett Reid sealed it with a steal in the final seconds. Deshler led 54-52 with :34 to play. Fayette had been hitting threes consistently, but not this possession. Garrett would steal the ball with around five seconds to play and go for a layup to seal the win 56-52 and send Deshler back to Regionals.

The scene would shift from local gyms to Wallace State, where the games got bigger. The morning began with a Mars Hill sweep (girls over Holly Pond and boys over Winfield), and for the boys, the tough schedule paid off. The Shoals success continued with Lauderdale County girls and boys winning. Setting up and guaranteeing at least one Shoals school would be in the final four on both the boys' and girls' sides. Wilson then made their regional debut and played the deepest into the season since 1990 (regionals began in 1994). They would make the Shoals 5-0 on the day.

It was then time for the Shoals area to be tested. West Morgan boys would beat Brooks, then Deshler girls fell to Good Hope, before Deshler boys survived East Lawrence. Muscle Shoals would then fall to Lee-Huntsville before Florence girls fell to Hillcrest-Tuscaloosa. The Shoals sent five teams to the Sweet Sixteen (Regionals first round) and went 5-5. We then proceed to the Elite Eight. Wilson would fall to Good Hope for the second straight season, but this time two rounds later.

Then came the drama and the rivalry. Deshler-West Morgan in a late-night battle, winner to the final four, loser goes home. These two have had some battles the last couple of years in basketball and football. It was set up to be a classic, and classic it was. Deshler led by nine at halftime. West Morgan had a big third quarter to tie it at 36 heading to the fourth. Back and forth it went down the final few minutes before settling in for another great finish. West Morgan led 47-43 with 1:30 left, but then threw the ball away with :46 to play, leading 47-45. Jalen Thirkill came up clutch, scoring the next four Deshler points to tie at 47. Garrett Reid put Deshler ahead 48-47 with 5.9 seconds left on a free throw. He was fouled after he stole a pass on a West Morgan possession and went for a layup. Deshler had fouls to give (lesson learned from the Miles Warren game-winner earlier in the season, they could have fouled him), but the fouls reset West Morgan and did not allow free throws. West Morgan got a look to win it, but Thirkill again came up with a block to deny West Morgan, or so we thought. The clock had expired, we thought. They put 0.2 seconds back on the clock, so it had to be a tip-in and no shot for West Morgan. The game was over.

Tuesday brought us Lauderdale County and Mars Hill. The good part is they split, and both fan bases got to advance to the Final Four. The bad part is the boys' game. Lauderdale County ran through Mars Hill boys with a 74-48 win. The Lauderdale boys' team is a very young team and may have played above their head this season, but they got valuable reps for next season. Mars Hill had played a tough schedule to get here and just did not have enough to compete with Lauderdale.

The girls' game was a battle. Mars Hill won 71-62, but Lauderdale would not go away. Mars Hill led by 17 in the third quarter. Lauderdale got it to five with 2:40 to play in the fourth. Belle Hill led Mars Hill with 32 points.

However, all three teams' runs would end in the final four as all three lost to the eventual champion in each class. Each final four game would also be the closest for each champion during the final four. This would be the first year since 2011 that no Shoals team would advance to the championship game.

Mars Hill girls and Lauderdale County boys had a similar story. They both ran into buzzsaws. Saint James beat Mars Hill girls by twenty; they basically let Belle Hill have her game and took away the help. Belle had 38 points and 16 rebounds; the rest of the team had 18 total points. Lauderdale County ran into Montgomery Academy (who defeated the 2025 Mars Hill boys to win in 2025). Lauderdale trailed by one at halftime, but a 21-8 third quarter put them behind the eight-ball.

The closest game of the Final Four for the Shoals was Deshler-Fairfield. Deshler led by two at halftime. Fairfield would take a three-point lead with 3:17 to play in the third quarter and decided to hold the ball until the end of the quarter. They led by five at the end of three. The lead grew to 10 with 2:00+ to play. Deshler cut it to three with :30 to play and had a chance to tie, but a controversial backcourt call ended the chance for Deshler, so they never got a shot off. Fairfield won by four, 61-57.

A couple of things to take away from this season. Next season, Montgomery Academy will not be able to play Lauderdale County in the playoffs due to the private-public split. Mars Hill and Saint James will be together in Single-A Private. Fairfield, nor anyone, will be able to hold the ball for minutes because of the shot clock coming in.

Zack Ponders

Shoals Sports Report