

2026 AHSAA North Regional Softball Preview

Sports and holidays are often linked. We all associate the following, thanksgiving and football, basketball and christmas, baseball and Fourth of July. Well we are at another holiday/sports combination. Softball and mothers day. The calendar this year runs a little late as this would usually be the weekend before the state tournament but we get an extra week this season so regionals begin on Monday with 4A and will conclude with 3A on Thursday. Our coverage area will send eight teams to the regionals this season (Shoals Christian, Lexington, Colbert Heights, Mars Hill, Colbert County, Rogers, Wilson, and Central). These eight teams have combined for a record of 215-122--4 (.636). That record includes two 40+ win teams (Central and Colbert County) and three teams under 10 losses (Central, Colbert County, and Colbert Heights).

We'll go team by team previewing their regional tournament plus comments from the coaches of each team. We will go in order of days played (Monday 4A, Tuesday 1A, Wednesday 2A, 3A). Each team will play two games on day one of regionals and must win one to advance to day two.

Wilson (Coach; Taylor Brown)

First Two Games: Monday 9:00am (Dora), 1:45 (West Morgan/Hamilton)

Seed: 4A Area 14 Champion

Record: 22-20-2

Key Wins: Brooks 12-10 (3/16), Hatton 16-8 F/8 (3/17), Mars Hill 12-4 (4/4), 10-4 (4/10), Central 16-6 (4/9), Florence 24-8 (4/11), West Morgan 9-7 (4/24)

Key Losses: Central 6-8 (3/31), 3-4 (4/11), 6-8 (4/11), Rogers 5-6 (4/21), Brooks 2-5 (4/21),

Our Thoughts: 4A Area 14 is arguably tougher than the north regional due to the level of competition in it. Two 40+ win teams with Central and Doshier, State powerhouse Hatton, and Brooks who had been to state three straight seasons from 2022-2024. However, do not tell Wilson that, they do not care. Fifth seed last season turned out to be area champions and third seed this season repeated as area champions. They may be the best tournament team in our coverage area as in tournaments alone they are 18-10-2. Outside of tournaments they are 4-10. They beat Central twice in the area tournament, overcoming losing four of the first five meetings and three by a score of 8-6. Last season, they peaked at the right time and were one win short of making state. It is easier to hunt, than be hunted though.

Coach's Comments

Q: What best way can you explain how your team has maintained confidence the last two seasons to win the area tournament as a 5-seed and a 3-seed?

A: I think our confidence comes from the belief we have in each other and the work these girls put in every single day. We've never really focused on what seed we are. We focus on competing, staying together, and playing our best softball at the right time. The girls have learned that once the postseason starts, anything can happen if you trust the process and play for each other.

Q: How has last season's regional run helped this season's team, plus the playoff runs in basketball and volleyball?

A: Last year's regional run gave our girls experience and showed them what it takes to compete at a high level. Having so many athletes that have played deep into the postseason in basketball, volleyball, and softball has helped build toughness and confidence across the board. Those experiences teach composure, leadership, and how to handle pressure moments, and I think that's carried over into this season.

Q: How does playing in a tough area help your team for regionals and this time of year?

A: Playing in a tough area prepares you for postseason softball because you're challenged every single game. Our girls are used to facing good competition, playing in pressure situations, and having to fight for every win. By the time regionals come around, they've already been tested, and I think that helps us stay calm and confident no matter who we play.

Central (Coach: Ben Mansell)

First Two Games: Monday 9:00am (Cordova), 1:45pm (Curry/Good Hope)

Seed: 4A Area 14 Runner-Up

Record: 40-11

Key Wins: Austin 6-5 (2/27), Wilson 8-6 (3/3), 8-6 (3/31), 4-3 (4/11), 8-6 (4/11), Mars Hill 8-5 (3/21), Brooks 15-14 (4/10), Rogers 4-3 (4/11), Florence 9-6 (4/11), Deshler 12-4 (4/14)

Key Losses: Wilson 6-16 (4/9), West Morgan 6-7 (4/24), 7-8 (4/24)

Our Thoughts: This team showed a lot during the area tournament. They beat Deshler 1-0 in an elimination game after splitting in the regular season. Like most of the teams in our coverage area they do not have a lot of upperclassmen, only having one senior. The county tournament 4/9-4/11 was something to take note of. Central lost to Wilson 16-6 in the opening round and then won six straight over three days to win the county tournament. They hosted the area tournament the last two seasons and missed regionals last season. This year, they are back at regionals. They have been one of the four best tournament teams all season in our opinion, alongside Colbert County, Deshler, and Wilson. The losses to West Morgan were in a tournament in Athens and I believe it was a 7:30 Friday game and a 11:00am Saturday game and both walkoffs.

Coach Comments

Q: How does playing in a tough area help your team for regionals and this time of year?

A: I think it prepares you to play a complete 7 inning game. Meaning we have to be good in every phase of the game to give ourselves a chance to succeed. I believe it also prepares you to overcome any adversity/tough situation that arises in a competitive game. I really feel that we play in a very tough/competitive area where there are teams who have the ability to compete at regionals no longer playing.

Q: What does it mean for your team to make regionals this season?

A: I think it is a tremendous accomplishment for our players and program. As stated earlier, we play in a tough/competitive area. Getting into regionals is not an easy task and anytime you are able to advance and continue to play ball is a big deal and something to be proud about.

Q: What was the turning point of the season when it felt like yall knew yall could make regionals?

A: It is really difficult to pinpoint one exact moment of the season where we believe we could make it to regionals. It begins in the off-season and early practices. I think we approached that the correct way along with the chemistry of our team set the foundation for us to have the ability to advance and compete in the regional tournament.

Shoals Christian (Coach Haley Hayes)

First Two Games: Tuesday 10:45am (South Lamar), 3:15pm (Berry/Lynn)

Seed: 1A Area 16 Runner-Up

Record: 23-19-1

Key Wins: Athens Bible 3-1 (3/2), Winston County 11-1 (3/3), Waterloo 8-7 (3/20), Mars Hill 5-0 (4/17)

Key Losses: Waterloo 2-9 (3/17)

Our Thoughts: If you want to see the feel-good story of the softball season around here look no further. In an area that has been dominated by Waterloo and/or Cherokee and Athens Bible for years, there's a new face in town. Shoals Christian. The key wins section does not tell the full story. They beat Cherokee, Covenant Christian, Athens Bible, and Waterloo all this season.

According to research it was the first time they had swept Cherokee and swept Covenant as well as first time beating Waterloo and Athens Bible. They entered the season the with a mantra of #NoMoreGreenTeams meaning it had always been Waterloo, Covenant, or Athens Bible advancing to regionals and they wanted to make it only one of them. The bracket at the area tournament fell just right where once Shoals eliminated Cherokee they got to go right through Covenant and Waterloo to make regionals. Then had a late push versus Athens Bible before falling 4-3. This was also a season where they did not get run-ruled all season. If they get a win on day one it will be interesting to see how far they can run at regionals.

Coach Comments

Q: Preseason, you gave us the quote of #NoMoreGreenTeams. Your team got to eliminate two of the three green teams and nearly beat Athens Bible. How does it feel to see that goal reached?

A: For the last two years, #NoMoreGreenTeams has been more than just a slogan to us... it became a mindset. Our four seniors bought into the vision from day one, and the rest of the team followed their lead. As much as I'd love to take credit for this turnaround, the truth is these girls are the reason it happened. Their grit, resilience, and refusal to quit changed this program. This team has been knocked down, doubted, and embarrassed more times than people realize. But every single time, they got back up. They kept showing up. They kept believing. Watching them eliminate two of those teams and compete toe-to-toe with Athens Bible was incredibly emotional because it proved just how far they've come. Not only as athletes, but as competitors who finally believe they belong.

Q: Y'all have been one of the better stories of this softball season and played in some of the biggest local tournaments. How far has this team come since you took over as head coach?

A: The statistics speak for themselves, and trust me, I could talk about those for hours. But honestly, the biggest transformation has been mental, not physical. We didn't just have to teach fundamentals or strategy... We had to completely rebuild confidence. This program came from years of losing, and not just losing, but often getting run-ruled. That kind of history can break a team mentally if you let it. These girls genuinely didn't know how to win because they had never been shown they were capable of it. That was the hardest challenge of all. Together, we had to overcome some massive mental hurdles, and it became one of the most rewarding journeys I've ever experienced as both a coach and a person. It honestly broke my heart realizing so many of them never believed they were enough. On the toughest days, those three simple words became part of our foundation: You are enough! Once they started believing that, everything changed!

Q: What is your team most excited for, being at Regionals for the first time since 2017?

A: Obviously, competing at a tournament with some of the best teams in the state is an incredible honor. But for this group, it's about so much more than softball. It's about the journey that got us here. This team had to defeat programs that had dominated them for over six years. They had to rewrite the narrative surrounding this program and about themselves. Just getting to Regionals is proof of how much heart, sacrifice, and perseverance these girls have poured into this season. For us, Regionals feels like the reward for never giving up on each other. And through it all, we've been quick to give glory and thanks to the One who sacrificed everything for us. We know none of this happens without Him guiding us every step of the way.

Lexington (Coach Ricky Rice)

First Two Games: 10:45am (Tuscaloosa Academy), 3:15pm (Belgreen/Winston County)

Seed: 2A Area 14 Champions

Record: 12-18

Key Wins: Lauderdale County 8-6 (3/2), Athens Bible 5-4 (3/20), Belgreen 9-7 (3/21), Lindsay Lane 14-11 (4/7)

Key Losses: Lindsay Lane 2-9 (3/31)

Our Thoughts: They beat the teams they were supposed to beat. The schedule was backloaded with upper-level competition including Deshler, Hamilton, Hoover, Colbert Heights. This is a mostly young team that has played above their heads at times. They had to comeback in both area tournament games to get to regionals and win the area. They have also played Belgreen once before and won so if they can play them in game two they have a good chance.

Coach Comments

Q: Your team had two comeback wins in the area tournament, being a young team and showing that fight..what does that tell you about your team this season?

A: We actually had two huge comeback wins in a tournament at Elkmont (Athens Bible and Belgreen) earlier in the year, so I knew we were capable of doing that. We had been struggling at the plate the last two weeks, so for our team to be able to do that was very satisfying to see as a coach. Plus I think the schedule we played this season prepared us for that moment as well.

Q: Despite the 12-18 record, you have played a tough schedule. How has that prepared this team for this time of year?

A: Yes, I think the tough schedule has prepared us to be able to play with the quality teams we will be facing in the region tournament. There was a two week stretch where our schedule was brutal! I'm very proud of our players for looking at the "bigger picture" and not getting down on themselves because we got shutout 5 games during that stretch. It was tough but we managed to weather the storm!

Q: Your team gets to play in Florence for regionals, how have you seen the community of Lexington support this team in year one as head coach?

A: Needless to say our community is very excited about our team advancing to play in the region tournament! The community has hung in there with us even during the stretch we struggled. We will have a huge following to Florence and hope our team performs to the best of their ability and represents Lexington High School with class!

Colbert Heights (Coach Brad James)

First Two Games Wednesday 9:00am (Rogers), 1:45pm (Winfield/Whitesburg)

Seed: 3A Area 14 Champions

Record: 31-9

Key Wins: Florence 3-2 (3/3), 11-1 (4/21), Waterloo 6-4 (3/14), Mars Hill 8-6 (4/2), Mars Hill 2-1 (4/7)

Key Losses: Colbert County 2-4 (3/7), Central 3-16 (4/4)

Our Thoughts: One of the better offenses in our coverage area. They can put up runs in bunches. The top four of the lineup can drive in runs and hit home runs as well. Troy commit and leadoff hitter Addison Holcomb (Junior) is one of the top home run hitters in our area. Eydie Keenum has turned into their go-to pitcher. They got here last season and bowed out quick with an 0-2 outing. They get a local team (Rogers) first so we shall see how they start this season.

Coach Comments

Q: Your first game is Rogers, is it easier or tougher to play a local team first? Why?

A: This one is going to be tougher for me because Coach (Troy) Pettus and I are pretty good friends. I know he is competitive, and I know that he knows softball.

Q: The top of your lineup has produced all season, how does it help knowing you can almost always expect one of them to step up?

A: The top of our lineup has been consistent all year. The key to our success will come down to the bottom of our order stepping up in the postseason.

Q: With a 31-9 record, your team knows how to win, was there any motivation coming off of last season's regional appearance that helped fuel this team to be better?

A: We try to approach each game as just another game. We want to play our best game every time we take the field. Every game counts. Every at bat counts. Every defensive play counts. That mentality will help take any extra pressure off the players.

Mars Hill (Coach Mollie Lowry)

First Two Games: Wednesday 9:00am (Colbert County), 1:45pm (Madison Academy/Gordo)

Seed: 3A Area 14 Runner-Up

Record: 21-24

Key Wins: Huntsville 2-0 (4/3), Lauderdale County 11-5 (4/9), Whitesburg Christian 3-2 (4/17)

Key Losses: Colbert County 6-14 (2/28), 0-12 (3/10), 0-4 (3/31), Hackleburg 1-11 (March 5), 1-7 (4/16), Deshler 2-10 (3/14), Central 5-8 (3/21), Colbert Heights 6-8 (4/2), 1-2 (4/7), Wilson 4-12 (4/4), 4-10 (4/10), Rogers 8-9 (4/10)

Our Thoughts: Do not be fooled. This is not a normal under .500 team. Look at the key loss section, 11 of those are from teams that are playing at regionals in Florence. They got off to an 0-4 start but were missing the basketball girls who were on the Final Four team. If you remove the five games without them they are 20-19. It is still Mars Hill and there is still the standard of excellence they pursue.

Coach Comments

Q: You open with Colbert County and have played them three times already. How does that help preparation for the opening game?

A: Colbert County is a great team with a lot of very talented girls. Our focus is and has always been to show up and play our game regardless of who is in the other dugout. It's post season time, everything that has happened up to this point was just preparation for this moment. We just have to show up focused, ready to play hard, and control the controllables, everything past that is out of our hands.

Q: How has the tough schedule helped prepare this team for regionals?

A: We have faced a lot of adversity this year and played some tough games. Every moment is a learning opportunity. We talk daily about failure and what we always say is that failure is not what defines you, it is how you respond that shows who you truly are as a person. And seeing this team work through that this year has been really great to watch. These girls are not only pushing themselves athletically, but they also strive to achieve the most in the classroom, and spiritually. These girls have faced some tough losses this year and really been challenged mentally, but all that matters is what we do next. I love this team and I believe in this team, I have seen them grow tremendously over the past 3 months and I am really excited to watch them show up and fight in regionals.

Q: Your team has some girls who have played basketball and made deep playoff runs. How does that experience help this time of year?

A: We have girls on our team that have made deep playoff runs in volleyball, basketball, and softball over the past 4 years. Mars Hill Athletics has a championship mindset across all of our programs and the success is contagious. We have 6 girls on our team that have been a part of at least one state runner-up or state champion finish in one or more sports. The girls do not realize how abnormal it is to experience such success in not one, but multiple sports over a 4 year period. This experience is invaluable. We are not satisfied with reaching the regional tournament, we want more and we expect more. Everyday we get to keep playing is a blessing, we just want to get better with each and every opportunity that is placed in front of us.

Colbert County (Coach Will Inman)

First Two Games: Wednesday 9:00am (Mars Hill), 1:45pm (Madison Academy/Gordo)

Seed: 3A Area 16 Champions

Record: 45-8

Key Wins: Colbert Heights 4-2 (3/7), Rogers 1-0 (3/10), 10-1 (4/7), Mars Hill 14-6 (2/28), 12-0 (3/17), 4-0 (3/31), Mortimer Jordan 5-0 (4/11), Corner 7-4 (4/11), Pisgah 7-1 (4/11), 3-0 (4/25) Deshler 5-1 (4/18)

Key Losses: Curry 0-2 (3/14), Corner 1-6 (4/10)

Our Thoughts: The score does not matter for some teams because the pitcher is good enough to win a 1-0 game or a 10-9 game. That would be Makayli Davis who has 460+ strikeouts entering the regional tournament. She has had 10+ strikeouts in 10 of her last 12 outings. Then there is the offense for this team led by Hallie Holland and her sister Kylee Holland. They have gone and played near any solid team in the north/central part of the state. Coach Inman cannot ask for a better first year than this team setting numerous records who look to bring the first female team sport trophy back to Leighton.

Coach Comments

Q: This may be the best season so far for any girls team in school history. How has the community supported this team?

A: The town of Leighton loves their school and athletic programs. They have been gracious with their time, financial resources and plenty of team meals. There is just something about that small town and small school vibe.

Q: How does having Makayli Davis in the circle relieve you as a coach knowing she can get outs?

A: Makayli is going to be Makayli! It's nice having that in the circle for sure because I've not had the luxury of that in the past. However, I think she would be the first to say this also and that is our defense has continued to get better and better as the year has progressed and offensively it takes pressure off of us. We know how deep our lineup is and we will eventually score enough to bust the game open.

Q: Y'all have played in tournaments with Russellville, Hayden, Curry, out of state schools, Mortimer Jordan, Pisgah, etc. How does playing a tough tournament schedule prepare your team for this time of year?

A: I didn't envision 45-8 with the schedule I knew we had ahead of us but the girls have bought in better than any team I have ever coached and they truly just want to do whatever it takes to win. I believe the experience and pressure of being in the championship games we are able to play ourselves into this year will really help us in the postseason.

Rogers (Coach Troy Pettus)

First Two Games Wednesday 9:00am (Colbert Heights), 1:45pm (Winfield/Whitesburg)

Seed: 3A Area 16 Runner-Up

Record: 21-13-1

Key Wins: Winfield 4-2 (3/13), Deshler 9-4 (4/6), Mars Hill 9-8 (4/10), James Clemens 6-1 (4/17), Wilson 6-5 (4/21)

Key Losses: Colbert County 0-1 (3/10), West Morgan 4-5 (3/14), Central 3-4 (4/11),

Our Thoughts: One of the youngest teams in our coverage area but have played several teams in the 3A regional bracket, aside from Colbert Heights. They fell one game short of the state tournament last season at regionals. Everyone was shocked when they beat Deshler on April 6th but that was due to five runs in the first inning. They trailed Wilson 5-1 and won 6-5 scoring five in the final two innings. They are not an easy out and they play solid defense

Coach Comments

Q: Most of your team was on the team that made regionals last season, how has that experience helped this season?

A: Experience is invaluable this time of year. We are still relatively a young team only starting 1 senior on a team that has post season experience. These girls have played in some big games so I know they handle this week and next the right way.

Q: Your first game is Colbert Heights, is it easier or tougher to play a local team first? Why?

A: It's funny we are so close to one another but haven't played each other this year. At this point we all are scouted to death so I'm not sure if it's a positive or negative. Coach James does a good job over there on the mountain and I know he will have his team ready to go.

Q: With a balanced lineup, it can be a different person each game. How does that ease the pressure knowing one or two players do not have to do it all each game?

A: You said it. We have a balanced lineup and 1-9 has stepped up when we've needed them. Just like the game against Lauderdale county on Saturday our nine hole hit a bases loaded triple with two outs and we could go through each girl throughout the year that has done the same at some point.