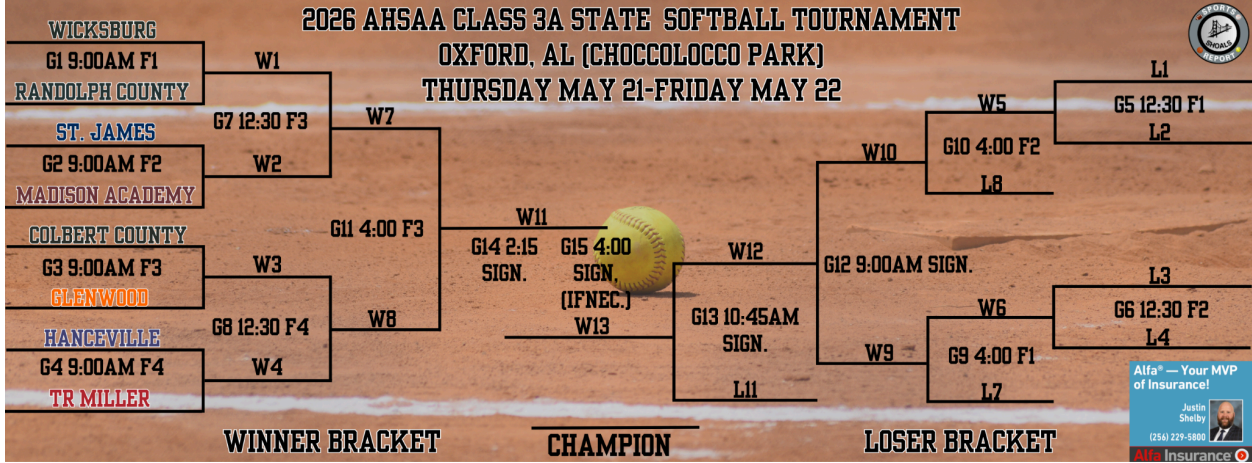


Leighton to Oxford: Colbert County Softball State Tournament Preview



If you are of a certain age demographic in the Shoals, you remember the days of Hazlewood, Courtland, RA Hubbard, and Colbert County. Long before Deshler, Muscle Shoals, and Mars Hill ran the Shoals, these small communities were winning everything. Colbert County has state championships in football and boys' basketball. The girls' programs have had runs, but the basketball team ran into the Lauderdale County buzzsaw during the five-peat and after the five-peat. However, this run from softball has a chance to do something no major sport (basketball, softball, volleyball) has done at Colbert County and bring home a trophy.

Coach Will Inman had built up the Lawrence County (AL) softball program, then decided to take a leap of faith. He was told he was crazy, that it was “career suicide.” He saw more. He saw a team that he had scouted for an in-season tournament last season to potentially play. He saw an 18-17-1 team with a pitcher committed to the University of North Alabama (Makayli Davis) and a catcher committed to Northwest-Shoals Community College (Hallie Holland), and a group of juniors that had potential. A group that had the potential to reach the state tournament. However, that team in 2025 missed regionals by one game. Those comments, along with the talent and potential of the 2026 Colbert County Indians Softball team, laid the foundation.

Led by a senior battery of Davis and Holland. This team enters the state tournament with a record of 48-8. Davis leads the nation in strikeouts with 520 (11.08 per game average). [National Strikeout Leaders](#). Holland has been on the receiving end of most, if not all, of those. That is the most strikeouts locally since Hannah Price (Rogers, 2021). Hallie also holds the career home-run record at Colbert County, which she broke this season. She has a sister who is chasing that record as well (Kylee Holland). Harmonie McClain, Ella Jeffreys, Leah Owens, and Jahkia Madden round out the senior class. The underclassmen have also produced Freshmen Megan Wisdom, 8th grader Bellah Hill and Faith Matlock, and more. Oh, and we cannot forget

4-hole hitter junior Creleigh Gargis, who has had some performances along the way. Of the eight losses, only one is to a 3A team (Lauderdale County); the others are 4A and above.

We talked with Coach Will Inman about this season and will have our questions and his answers below.

Q: How do you settle your team's nerves/jitters when they have never been this far before in the playoffs?

A: I think nerves are a natural part of the game. We've been talking about the postseason run all year long so I think that's helped to know what to expect to a degree but it's still something you have to experience and this experience has been great for our young players and this should help set the standard going forward for our program.

Q: Was there any nerves for the Mars Hill game on Thursday? (Opening Round at Regionals)

A: Yes, but as expected. Most of these girls have not experienced a regional before and I believe playing a familiar opponent possibly made the nerves a little more noticeable early on. But I was proud of how we competed and found a way. I knew going in we had the toughest draw. It is what it is. Coach (Mollie) Lowery is one of the best coaches in North Alabama and Mars Hill expects to make postseason runs year in and year out. Then you add an 11 day break and I knew she would have her team ready and she did. We survived game 1 and I told my girls game 1 would be the toughest to win but we had to find a way. Then we get Madison Academy with a D1 arm in the circle in Cataryna Schreiber. She's phenomenal and I'm willing to bet we will see her again this week. My girls stuck to the plan and (Makayli) Davis was really locked in for us in the circle. I also thought (Creleigh) Gargis was really big for us in that game. Kid is a gamer and does everything I ask of her. Game 3 was Winfield, I felt that game was a better matchup for us than any of the two on Day 1 strictly from a pitching standpoint. We had two offensive plans ready for Winfield based on who they started in the circle. The Holland sisters (Hallie and Kylee) executed the start of that game to perfection and we were able to bust it open early. Gargis, Davis, and Harmonie McClain had big days. We were much better offensively as a team. Several factors played into that but I was extremely proud of the execution from 1-9. That's what it takes this time of the year.

Q: This is your first trip to state as a coach, coming up just short last season (Lawrence County) losing the Q1 and Q2 game by a run each. What did you learn from that? Did it change how you coached at regionals this season?

A: I've not really thought about that much. I felt like with how good our pitching is that I could be more aggressive from the start in other areas of the game. If we can bust a game open early

we can take the pressure off of us and take the threat of our opponents trying to small ball us away.

Q: How does it feel to be the one to set the standard for girls sports to make deep playoff runs at Colbert County?

A: This is not about me in any form or fashion. Those 15 girls I have are winners! They have bought in and trusted us as staff every day to make our team better. CC has had some talent in years past and that's obvious this year as well. I also have a great staff. My dad (Anthony Inman) who has over 20 years coaching experience and then Coach (Lee) Allen is instrumental in our scouting side of things. It's been a really good mesh all year and that's definitely helped with our success. That may be the one difference the players would tell you is that we make sure they are as prepared as possible for any opponent we are going to play. We don't let them go into a game blind. They will know something about whoever is next on our schedule.

Q: Your seniors will graduate on Tuesday (May 19), then go to play state on Thursday (May 21). Have yall talked about how rare that is?

A: Yes, but we don't talk much about graduation. That's been a sore subject. All I will say to that is to come see us in Oxford!

Q: Any early thoughts on Glenwood (Opening Round) and Hanceville, TR Miller (Second Round matchup, based on results)?

A: I like our draw. Glenwood has a good team. They've won 30 games this year. I expect my girls to come out and compete their tails off. They know we are 4 straight wins away from making history and I love our chances. We've already played Hanceville and won 9-3 and (Makayli) Davis didn't throw (that game) so that makes me feel good as a coach also. We just have to focus on who's next and go from there. We will have a plan to put our players in the best situation possible to end the week with the blue map!

And one final message from Coach Inman,

“Last thing, THANK YOU to the people of Leighton. I appreciate how you have taken myself and my family in. We are forever grateful for all the support! Come see us in Oxford. These girls deserve the best cheering section in the state!
Roll Tribe!”

Zack Pounders

Shoals Sports Report