

# SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SPORTS CONNECTION

February 2026 • Single Copy Free

## FOREVER THE ACE!

**From tiny Stonefort, in Southern Illinois, Scott Shreffler carved his name in the basketball record books at Marion High School and the University of Evansville and is still deeply involved in the Aces' program. [page 6](#)**



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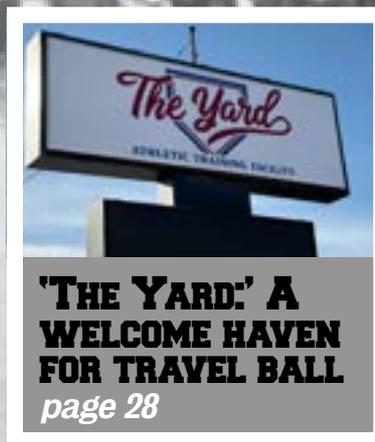


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# Welcome to a big issue for the shortest month of the year!

Greetings and welcome to the February issue of Southern Illinois Sports Connection! As always, we are thrilled to have you alongside for another issue of the most unique and STILL FREE publication in the region.

Wait a minute...let me rephrase that last sentence. As always, we are thrilled to have you alongside for another issue of the most unique and ONLY FREE sports publication in the region. Now...that's better!

The month of February is quite unique in that it is the shortest month in the entire calendar, but jam-packed with significant dates. After the January we had weather-wise here in Southern Illinois February 2 was a day watched by many as "Punxsatawney Phil" did see his shadow and predicted six more weeks of winter. You know it's been a particularly bad January when you hang your hopes on a groundhog! But, hey, any hope is better than no hope!

Additionally, here in February we have Valentine's Day, Lincoln's Birthday and President's Day. All that crammed into the shortest month of the year!

But there are several other red-letter dates in the month of February — dates that I delve into in my column this month. Along with all those other important dates, we are also looking forward to the IHSA releasing the seedings and pairing for all four classes in



boys' high school basketball.

Assignments for regionals and sub-sectionals have already been released, but the real drama will play out on February 12 when the seedings are announced and the following day, February 13, when the pairings will be announced. Regional play — the official beginning of February Fever that turns into March Madness — will begin for all classes during the week of February 23.

In short, it's about to get crazy for high school basketball junkies. I think you will enjoy my column, where I even dusted my crystal ball off and made a few post season predictions for Class 1A, which is as hotly-contested as any year, I've ever witnessed.

This month we also have an interesting feature by local sports historian/scribe Davy Broy who jumps into the fray (maybe the frying pan) as he looks at the impact travel ball and "helicopter parents" have had on coaching

and sports programs. Broy backs up the fine piece of writing by calling on the opinions of three long-time and successful high school coaches/athletic directors. It's a must-read this month!

We also have an excellent feature by Brett Beasley as he looks at the remarkable success of Scott Shreffler, of Marion, who had a great collegiate career at Evansville. You will enjoy reading about Shreffler and reminiscing about a special time in Southern Illinois sports.

We also have a great story by Randy Olson, who writes this month about an innovative not-for-profit Mt. Vernon organization, fondly nicknamed the "Renegades" who have promoted and taken travel baseball and softball to an impressive level.

We also have our usual cast of diverse columnists delving into a variety of interesting and timely topics!

And as always, I want to give

a big shout-out to our faithful advertisers who continue to support our monthly effort with SISC.

The unwavering support of these good folks allows us to continue to offer you a quality publication that is not only STILL FREE...but also chocked full of great stories, columns, insight and pictures!

And hand-in-hand with that last sentence, another thank you goes out to the wonderful businesses that allow us to distribute SISC each month.

The next time you grab your monthly copy, take a moment and thank the owner/manager/employee for providing us space each month!

Finally, as of this writing, it is only 45 days until the first day of Spring! Hang in there, MLB Spring Training begins this month and it won't be long until mowing and weed-eating is a weekly chore again!

Thanks for taking the time to read this and God's Blessings to you!

Jim Muir,  
Publisher of Southern Illinois  
Sports Connection

**2025-26**

## IHSA OFFICIALS OF THE YEAR

SPORT	OFFICIAL	HOMETOWN
BOYS VOLLEYBALL	PAT DOYLE	MANHATTAN
BOYS SWIMMING & DIVING	MICHAEL BAUGHMAN	GENEVA
GIRLS SWIMMING & DIVING	JANET STERN	DEERFIELD
WATER POLO	MARK MENIS	NAPERVILLE
CROSS COUNTRY	GARY P. GULLONE	GALENA
BOYS TRACK & FIELD	ARTHUR P. ASHBROOK	MAKANDA
GIRLS TRACK & FIELD	SHAWN STRACHAN	REYNOLDS
GIRLS GYMNASTICS	BETTY BENNETT	EAST DUNDEE
COMPETITIVE CHEERLEADING	CARLA TAYLOR-WALTON	KOKOMO, IN
COMPETITIVE DANCE	LISA DJANI	CHICAGO

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**2025-26**

## IHSA OFFICIALS OF THE YEAR

SPORT	OFFICIAL	HOMETOWN
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GIRLS SOCCER	DYLAN KRAMER	ELMHURST
FOOTBALL	CHRIS HARTBANK	MATTOON
BOYS BASKETBALL	JAMES KOWZAN	DUQUOIN
GIRLS BASKETBALL	MICHAEL BELL	CHARLESTON
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# A pair of Southern Illinois officials honored with awards from the IHSA

*Provided by the IHSA*

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS — Two officials from southern Illinois were among those honored by the Illinois High School Association as 2025-26 Officials of the Year, recognizing excellence across 22 IHSA sports statewide.

John T. Allen of Carterville was

named Baseball Official of the Year, while James Kowzan of Du Quoin received Boys Basketball Official of the Year honors. Both were selected through the IHSA's nomination and voting process, which evaluates officials on character, skill, and experience working IHSA State Series events.

The awards are presented

annually by the Illinois High School Association, which oversees interscholastic athletics and activities for more than 800 member schools across the state.

"The IHSA Officials of the Year exemplify professionalism, consistency, and respect for the game," IHSA Executive Director Craig Anderson said in a release.

"Their dedication extends far beyond enforcing the rules, helping teach sportsmanship and uphold the values of education-based athletics."

Allen and Kowzan will be formally recognized along with the other honorees during the 2026 IHSA Officials Conference, scheduled for July 10-11 in Normal.



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# Forever the Ace!

From tiny Stonefort, in Southern Illinois, Scott Shreffler carved his name in the basketball record books at Marion High School and the University of Evansville and is still deeply involved in the Aces' program

## Cover story •

BY BRETT BEASLEY

On March 17, 1989, No. 11 seed University of Evansville Purple Aces basketball team defeated No. 6 seed Oregon State Beavers 94-90 in the NCAA West Regional opening round.

Storylines abounded.

For Evansville, a powerhouse in NCAA Division II, the win was their first in Division I. It was a watershed moment for Coach Jim Crews, who would win 294 games at UE. Purple Aces' Scott Haffner and Dan Godfread shined on the national stage and each played their way onto NBA rosters in years to come.

The game was momentous for Oregon State as well. Future Hall of Famer and NBA Champion Gary "The Glove" Payton scored 31 points.

But, the real story for the Beavers centered around their 70-year-old coach, Ralph Miller. Miller had just coached the final game of his storied career that included 38 seasons, 674 wins, twice named National Coach of the Year, 10 NCAA appearances, seven conference championships, 22 players drafted in the NBA, and his induction in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

After the final buzzer, the Aces emptied onto the floor in celebration. CBS switched to Miller as he made his final walk from the court. With the Aces' celebration in the background, Evansville freshman guard Scott Shreffler can be seen leaving the celebration, running to engage Ralph Miller and sharing a word and handshake.

Shreffler played 42 minutes, was tasked with guarding the All-American Payton, scored 13 points, including two free throws to seal the victory. The magnitude of the moment was not lost on the Aces' teenager. When Shreffler made his move to acknowledge Coach Miller, he exhibited the class and respect for basketball that defined him as a player and person.

Scott Shreffler would become a University of Evansville Hall of Famer. He has carved out more than his place as a great player. He has cemented himself in the City of Evansville and in the hearts of Purple Aces fans.

He maintained a standard of excellence on and off the court, bringing recognition to the others along for his journey.

When he explained his decision to play at Evansville, Scott said he was not aware of the program's history.



Top right: Scott Shreffler with Aces' head coach Jim Crews. Bottom right: Scott Shreffler launches a shot during a home game at Evansville.

“I had never seen an Aces game in person until they had started recruiting me. I saw them play at SIU and thought the purple and gold jerseys with the sleeves were cool.”

He visited the campus and watched a game at Roberts Stadium. That experience convinced Scott that UE was the place for him.

“It was a sold-out crowd, and the atmosphere was amazing. They had Marty Simmons and Scott Haffner. I told my parents, if they offer me a scholarship this is where I want to go.”

Scott’s parents, Mick and Peggy Shreffler still live on the farm where they raised Scott near Stonefort, Illinois. A basketball was practically an appendage to young Scott.

“In any picture of me as a child I always had a ball in my hand,” he shared. “I played all the time. My

mom would listen to me dribble for so long until she would finally say, “enough, find something else to do for a while.”

For Scott, nothing rivaled playing basketball.

“I was a basketball junkie,” he admitted.

Roberts Stadium in Evansville was a historic venue and the perfect place for a basketball junkie. Coach Arad McCutcheon developed the Aces into perennial power during his 30-year tenure. He was enshrined in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. Five NCAA D-II Championship banners graced Roberts Stadium. McLeansboro native Jerry Sloan, arguably the most successful Southern Illinois basketball figure ever and Naismith Hall of Famer himself, had his jersey retired at UE.

see **SHREFFLER** page 8



Scott Shreffler and his family gaze upward at his No. 20 jersey retirement ceremony in Evansville in 2017. He played for the Aces from 1988-1993.



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## SHREFFLER

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Like Sloan, Scott Shreffler would have his jersey hung from the rafters at Roberts in 2017. Additionally, like Sloan, Scott's journey began on the family farm and in a meager gymnasium in a small Southern Illinois town.

Scott began his playing career at Stonefort Grade School for Coach Jim Bynum. Young "Scottie" made an impression much earlier.

"When I was in first grade, our bus arrived 30 minutes early, and I took a basketball with me every day. I would shoot around and was able to make shots just inside the free throw line. People would gather around and watch a little kid making shots."

Scott's fascination with basketball went to a new level as a fifth-



Scott receives instructions from Evansville Coach Jim Crews during a conference tournament game at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis.

grader.

The Carrier Mills-Stonefort

Wildcats, coached by Jeff Richey, upset defending state champion Nashville in the Super Sectional and made a trip to Champaign.

Scott said, "We went to every game we could, and when I didn't get to go, I would lay on my bed and listen to the games on the radio."

He added, "That was a great team, with guys like David Taborn and Steve Evans. I spoke with guys on that team years later and I told them that season did more to cement my love for basketball than anything else. I owe a lot to that group of guys."

Scott played his first two high school seasons at Carrier Mills-Stonefort. He played JV until the middle of his freshman season before starting varsity.

"Coach Richey had me sit right beside him on the bench. He would talk to me about game sit-

uations. He didn't just throw me out on the court. He prepared me to be ready to play."

Jeff Richey was coach and long-time family friend.

"Mick and Peggy had certain expectations for Scott," Richey explained. "They wanted him to play hard and conduct himself like a gentleman." Scott said of his parents, "they never got on me for missing shots or playing badly, but if I didn't play hard or with a bad attitude they did."

Scott's abilities were evident. His father Mick's cousin was Centralia and SIU great John "Mouse" Garrett.

"Mouse would take Scott up to Centralia and work with him," Mick said.

"He told me Scott had tremendous ability." Scott's extended family had a love for basketball. They were loyal and zealous fans.



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“We called him “20-money,” cousin Cassie Turner recalled.

Number 20 gained a lot of passionate fans.

Scott Shreffler’s basketball resume is impressive: Four-year starter in High School and College. Regional Champion at Carrier Mills-Stonefort. All-State honors at Marion and Southern Illinois High School Player of the Year his senior year.

When asked what made Scott a great player, Jeff Richey said,

“He had the ‘It Factor,’ it was as simple as that. He didn’t have to think about what to do, he reacted to it. He had what can’t be taught.”

Richey inserted Scott into games against older, quality players, but Scott held his own and routinely bested highly touted opponents.

Richey said, “The tougher the opponent the better he played.”

Shreffler played two seasons at

Marion for Coach Larry Jenkins.

“He was a fierce competitor,” Jenkins recalled. “He always had a drive to be better. He took losses personally and was never satisfied with himself. He would push himself to be better, and was always wanting to learn.”

“I did take losses personally,” Scott said, “and I would own it and use that with my teammates to encourage the team to get better.”

Like Richey, Coach Jenkins appreciated the support of Mick and Peggy Shreffler.

“We played one Friday, and Scott didn’t play particularly well. We had a game the next night, and they called and asked if they could come by the house and get the gym keys. Scott went up and shot and Peggy rebounded for him.”

see **SHREFFLER** page 8



Scott celebrates with his teammates after winning the 1993 Midwestern Collegiate Conference Tournament in Indianapolis.

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## SHREFFLER

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He added, “Peggy went into the bleachers after a ball and hurt her ankle.” When asked if she missed the game that night, he said, “Oh no!”

Evansville employed the motion offense Jim Crews knew from his time as player and assistant coach at Indiana, where he was part of the undefeated National Championship team in 1976. He recruited players for that system.

“It turned out to be the perfect storm for me to play in that system,” Shreffler recalled. “We went to basketball camp at IU when I was at Marion. We met Coach Knight and Steve Alford and Keith Smart. After camp, Coach Jenkins told us we were going to run the motion offense.” That decision proved to be fortuitous for

Scott. His ability as an all-around, smart, team player made him a great fit for Evansville.

“For him to go over and play right away in that complex motion offense spoke volumes about him as a player,” Larry Jenkins said.

Coach Crews realized the kind of player he had in Shreffler before practices began.

“We had a senior Troy Jones, a great young man, who was in line to be a full-time starter. The guys had been playing pick-up ball. Troy said, ‘Coach you are going to love Scott Shreffler.’” Shreffler eventually won the starting spot. Coach Crews commented: “It said a lot about a freshman to earn the respect of a senior with whom he was competing for playing time.”

Legendary Coach Arad McCutcheon brought national attention to the program at Evansville. Attendance at Roberts Stadium was among the highest in

all of college basketball. The program transitioned to NCAA D-I for the 1977-78 season. Tragedy struck the Aces family. The team charter plane crashed shortly after take-off from Evansville Airport. Southern Illinois greats Greg Smith, Kevin Kingston, and Mike Duff were among 29 who perished. The community mourned deeply. That catastrophe is forever etched in the hearts and minds of Aces’ fans. The program was resurrected under Coach Dick Walters who guided his 1981-82 team to the NCAA tourney. Jim Crews followed, leading Evansville to four NCAA and a pair of NIT appearances, and his enshrinement in the UE Hall of Fame.

The Ace Shreffler was a major part of that success. Evansville was 85-33 in games which he played. Coach Crews brought back the iconic short-sleeved jerseys to honor the legacy of the



Scott cuts down the net after winning his third and final Midwestern Collegiate Conference Tournament his senior year in 1993.

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Aces under Coach McCutcheon.

“At the time, I did not realize the magnitude of the tradition at Evansville,” Scott remembered. But as you get older you realize how special it is to wear the uniform.” Scott remembered, “Coach Crews told us the table had been set for us by Coach McCutcheon and his players in D-2, and it was our responsibility to establish a tradition in D-1.” During Scott’s time, the Aces made three NCAA appearances, won three conference regular-season and tournament titles each. Attendance his senior season was a school-record 11,700 per game.

Scott Shreffler’s statistics were excellent at every level. He was model of consistency. At Evansville, he averaged double figures each of his four years, scoring 1,454 points, eleventh in Aces history. He was second in the nation (91.8%) for free throws his senior year at Evansville. He finished second in school history in assists. The word “assist” characterized Scott Shreffler as a player and a person.

One man on the receiving end of Scott Shreffler assists was his fellow Southern Illinois farm boy Reed Jackson. After his stellar All-State career at NCOE, Jackson also carved out a Hall of Fame resume for the Purple Aces.

“I owe a great deal of my personal success to the impact Scott Shreffler had on me,” commented Jackson.

Jackson’s opinion of Shreffler as a player and a person could not be higher.

“His leadership was at a different level than anything I ever experienced in my career. He held everyone to a high standard.”

The expectations for playing college ball were extremely high, and Jackson had a great mentor in Shreffler. “Scott understood that standard and helped me. He is the most intelligent basketball player I ever played with.”

Coach Crews commended



Scott (middle) with daughter Emily and broadcast partner Jevin Redman in the Aces broadcast booth in 2021.

Scott’s willingness to do the hard things.

“He would be tough on his teammates and hold them accountable when they needed it.” Scott was Aces’ Captain in every sense of the word, and not just in basketball-related matters. He was dedicated to helping his teammates navigate and balance their educational and personal lives.

Scott met his now wife Elaine in class at UE. He referred to their marriage as a “match made in heaven.” The captain of the basketball team and the head cheerleader.

“Elaine was a great cheerleader,” said Scott. “We were playing at Arizona, and they were really good. During a time-out the crowd was going wild. I thought, what’s going on? I looked up and saw Elaine doing some kind of flip and the Arizona fans gave her a standing ovation.”

Elaine is “forever the ace,” too, you could say.

“I grew up an Aces fan,” she said. Her parents were UE grads. The family lived near the airport and a few miles from the site of

the infamous plane crash. Her family were regulars at games. She shared with a chuckle, “My grandfather thought I was marrying Scott Haffner, who he remembered scoring 65 points in a game. Their names were so close I had to tell him, no grandpa, I’m marrying the guy who had a lot of assists the night Haffner scored 65.” The “other Scott” has worked out pretty-well for Elaine, and for Scott too.

The Shrefflers have two daughters and have made Evansville their home. Makenzie is a UE grad and was a cheerleader like Elaine. She’s an ICU nurse at Deaconess. Emily is a sophomore majoring in Kinesiology at Purdue. Scott is thrilled for her to be at Purdue; it gives him an excuse to go up to games and visit practice where his close friends Coach Matt Painter and Assistant Paul Lusk are so successful. Both girls have been standouts in sports, Makenzie in soccer and Emily in Lacrosse.

“Scott has supported them in everything they’ve done,” Elaine shared. “He’s a great girl dad;

he played golf with the girls and coached their sports teams, and he would play Barbies with them too!”

Scott and Elaine have their first grandchild, Drace. To no surprise, he likes basketball. Scott is teaching the three-year-old to play ball the right way, reminding him to dribble, he can’t just run up and shoot.

“He knows the team colors and mascots for all the Big 10 teams already!” Scott beamed.

When you think of Scott Shreffler, most think of his tremendous shooting ability. “Scott was a great shooter,” his Marion coach Larry Jenkins shared, “but he was a pass first kind of player. He got just as much satisfaction out of making a good pass to a teammate to score as he did making a basket himself.”

“I never cared how much I scored, really,” Scott stated. “I enjoyed getting other players involved. To see a guy hit a shot gave him a new energy you could see as he ran back up the court.”

Scott’s coaches and teammates lauded his playing ability, but each equally heaped praise on Scott Shreffler the man. “He is a servant, a giver,” said Jim Crews. “He volunteered in school reading programs and community efforts.”

“There is nothing Scott Shreffler wouldn’t do for me, and me for him,” said Reed Jackson.

Scott had assistant coaching positions at Armstrong State and Stetson after graduation. He is thrilled that men from those teams still text him and consult with him decades later. Scott admitted, “I love being able to work with young people and help make them better...but I decided I didn’t want to constantly move from place to place.”

Scott has never ceased having ties to the University of Evansville.

## SHREFFLER

from page 11

He has been a primary fund raiser, which included efforts dear to his heart. In 2019, one of Scott's best friends, teammate Sascha Hupman succumbed to the neurological disorder Ataxia. Scott spearheaded the effort to create a scholarship to honor his late friend. "He worked tirelessly after his best friend Sascha died," Reed Jackson said. "He is that kind of friend."

Scott works in the private sector for a pharmaceutical company presently. He is still all about the Aces. He is now in his 25th season as color-analyst on Aces radio broadcasts. He takes that responsibility seriously. Elaine said of him, "he will say he 'has to go to practice so he can know what's going on.'" Scott has an important role as an Aces player. "I have been able to build relationship with players who played before me, and I kind of serve as the connection for our basketball players of the past,"

When asked about his recruitment of Scott Shreffler, Jim Crews said without hesitation, "Scott won the lottery to have his parents. We could see he had an unbelievable foundation provided by his family. He came from very hard-working parents. Those were things we looked for in players."

When you ask Scott's coaches about him, their responses are basically identical. All speak of the quality person Scott has always been. They each consider Scott a close friend. They admire his family, and the way he consistently works to make things better for others.

Each coach shared that Scott played his best when the game was on the line.

"He played his best in big games," said Jenkins. "He went 49-50 from the free throw line



Scott (middle photo in bottom row) was featured on program page from the 1988 North-South IHSA Class AA All-Star Game.

during the fourth quarter of games for us," said Jeff Richey. Coach Crews recounted Scott's mentality to do whatever needed to be done to win.

"We had three separate occasions where the games came down to the last possession and we had the ball, each time with no time-outs. Scott set a screen to free up the game winning shot, another time he made the pass that resulted in the game winner, and he hit a last second shot to win another."

Scott's metal as a leader brought out the best in him. After the team meal on the afternoon of the Midwestern Collegiate Conference Championship game in 1993 against Xavier, the Aces players were trapped on a stalled elevator in their hotel. Reed Jackson said,

"You know you have 14 big college age guys trapped on an elevator, so guys were getting kind of nervous. Scott took the gray folder with the scouting report, and starting going over the game plan, first with our big guys, then everyone else. It helped calm guys down. That's the kind of leader he was."

Scott suffered a pair of serious basketball related injuries. "I watched him work so hard and endure so much pain and put in so much effort to rehabilitate from injuries it helped me go through it when I was injured myself."

"Scott established himself as a leader in the locker room," Jim Crews shared, "But his legacy (in Evansville) is defined by his life outside the locker room." Crews explained, "Twenty guys know the kind of teammate he was in the locker room. But Scott was a servant in the community. He was a giver. He would volunteer for school reading programs and make appearances at local events and speak."

Among the roles Scott has held post-college was fundraising for the University. While he now works in the private sector, he still supports the university and speaks with boosters.

His wife Elaine said, "It's like being out with the mayor when he walks into a room, he knows everybody and stops and talks with people."

Scott shared, "People recognize me in the grocery store after all these years. People I meet at business meetings remember the sleeves."

Scott stressed his appreciation or his parents.

"They sacrificed a great deal for me to play. Farm life requires hard work of young people, and Scott learned to work and was needed on the farm. "My dad saw something in me," Scott said, "he told me he wanted me to go to open gym and pursue basketball, and to help him when I could."

"He brought his teammates home as times and they helped out on the farm too," Mick said.

Peggy made her home a welcome place for Scott's friends.

"They probably watched 95 percent of my games at UE in person or when aired on television" (despite long distances).

"I'm amazed for a kid from

Stonefort to get the opportunities he's had," Peggy said. And what also makes his mom proud, she said, is the loving and caring individual he is.

The young man from Stonefort has had quite a life. He was an extra in the 1993 movie "Blue Chips" and was the focus of an article by award-winning journalist John Feinstein in a story published in the Washington Post.

Scott takes it all in stride and maintains the humility of a gentleman.

"I've had a lot of great people along for my journey," he said.

Mike Blake's iconic television career at WFIE Channel 14 in Evansville has spanned more than five decades and is the gold standard in broadcast journalism. He began covering the Aces in 1970.

He is highly respected and a beloved member of the Evansville community. He provided this assessment of Scott Shreffler.

"During his Hall of Fame career, Scott Shreffler was not only a terrific shooter and passer, he was also a great team leader who was tough as nails on both ends of the court, and a guy who played a major role in leading the Aces to three NCAA post-season appearances. Now 34 years later, Scott remains the consummate Aces supporter. He's ideal in his role as color commentator...insightful and always positive. And even when the Aces are struggling, he always remains loyal to the team, its coaches and program. He also leads the way in fundraising for the program in this extremely challenging era of the NIL.

"To me, I don't think UE or the Evansville community could have a better ambassador for the Aces Basketball program. Scott truly is a basketball Hall of Famer who also happens to be a Hall of Fame human being.

High praise for the man from Stonefort, Illinois.

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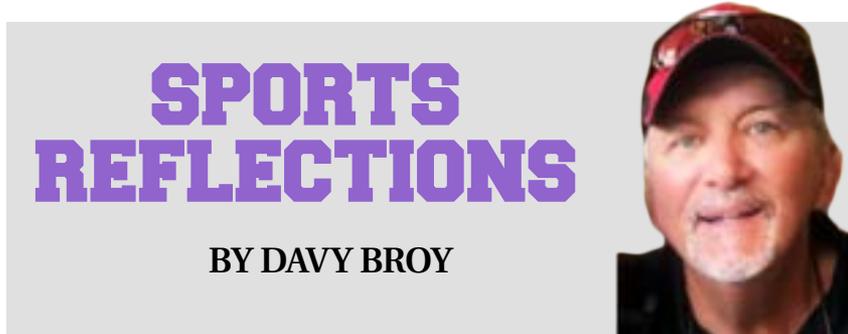
# Making great friends through sports

Most people have an enjoyable childhood that they share with friends from their neighborhood and their grade school. I was fortunate to have five close friends during my younger years and it mostly started through playing grade school sports together and also playing on a summer baseball team when we were about nine years old. It was some of the best times of our lives.

Other than my family members, I was closer to those five friends than anyone else during my childhood and I was a year younger than all of them. We all lived in the same part of town in West Frankfort and four of us Mark Roe, Bruce Swinkunas and Bill Troutt went to Franklin Grade School. The other two from our group Leonard Hopkins and Brad McClain went to St. John's Grade School which was two blocks south of Franklin. Five of us still live in this area while Brad lives in Texas.

Most of what we did as kids revolved around sports. In the summer months the six of us played Indian ball (a form of baseball) almost every day usually at Jefferson Field at the corner of north Jefferson and east 9th Streets. When we were nine and 10 years old, five of us played on a summer baseball team that was undefeated with over 20 wins until we lost our final game which was a one run heartbreaker to Metropolis for the Southern Illinois Khoury League championship.

There was not a dry eye in the dugout after that loss. We did get a bit of sweet revenge seven years later in the 1972 IHSA Class AA Regional basketball championship game at Harrisburg as three of us were on the West Frankfort team that beat Metropolis by 20



**Top picture:** West Frankfort friends since their childhood in the 1960s. Left to right: Bruce Swinkunas, Davy Broy, Leonard Hopkins, Mark Roe and Bill Troutt.

**Bottom picture:** Benton and West Frankfort sports rivals and friends since high school in the early 1970s. Left to right: Steve Stewart, Bill Smith, Davy Broy, Robert Corn and his son Rob, Leonard Hopkins and Tim Ricci.

points.

In the fall months, my five close friends and I played touch football quite often on the empty lot behind the old St. John's School. Five of us went on to play on the 1971 FCHS football team that finished 10-1 and still holds the record for most wins in West Frankfort football history. We also won the school's first South Seven Conference football championship in 25 years which was a huge deal at that time.

Even though we all went our separate ways as adults, our group had and still has a bond that's hard to explain. We all know that if we ever needed anything, there would be no hesitation in helping one another. We are now in our early 70s and it's been a long time since we all got together. The five of us that still live in this area recently had lunch together and it was awesome to see how close we still are as we talked about our long-time friendship.

After leaving grade school, I developed relationships through sports with kids from other towns. When young junior high and high school athletes compete against each other as fierce rivals, but also as friends, the level of competition and drive to win against each other can be extremely high.

That was never truer than in the late 1960s and early 1970s when county rivals Benton and West Frankfort battled against each other in several sports.

One of the best experiences in my adult life is reconnecting through Facebook with some of those former rivals, especially Robert Corn from Benton. Robert and I competed against each other in junior high basketball when he played for Ewing while I played for West Frankfort.

Then we competed against each other in high school as Robert went on to play basketball for Benton where he was one of the best players in Rangers' history. After playing college basketball, Robert had great success as a coach. He was an assistant basketball coach at the University of Alabama-Birmingham for 10 years and then the head coach at his alma mater Missouri Southern for 25 years.

Robert now lives in Georgia, but this past Thanksgiving he visited his family in Southern Illinois. Before he traveled back to the area, he organized a lunch get together in Benton that included two of his former

Benton teammates Steve Stewart and Billy Smith along with three former high school opponents and friends from West Frankfort Tim Ricci, Leonard Hopkins and myself. It was an awesome get together as six former county rivals talked a lot about the good old days.

During our high school years at West Frankfort and Benton, we had some very good games in multiple sports. West Frankfort's Ricci graduated from FCHS in 1971 as the all-time leading scorer in boys' basketball. He went on to play basketball at SIU-C. Ricci and Benton's Stewart, who graduated from BCHS in 1972, were

two of the best athletes in their school's history.

Leonard Hopkins graduated from West Frankfort in 1972 as one of the greatest quarterbacks in school history. He went on to play football at SIU-C. Robert Corn graduated from Benton in 1973 and I graduated the same year for West Frankfort. Billy Smith graduated from Benton in 1975 as one of the greatest athletes in school history. He went on to play basketball at Georgia Tech. He played four years of varsity basketball for Benton so he competed in high school with all of us except for Ricci.

The six of us were all fierce

rivals and competitors on the court/field during our high school years, but we were also respectful friends off. Over five decades later, it was great to see that the respect and friendships are now even stronger, and it all started through sports.

— **Davy Broy** is a lifelong resident of West Frankfort and a long-time sports fan, coach, and local sports historian. He served on the Frankfort School District Board of Education for 16 years (1983-1998). His column appears monthly in *Southern Illinois Sports Connection*. He also owns the website [www.westfrankfortsports.com](http://www.westfrankfortsports.com).

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# Fishing's March Madness

The activities this early in the year can only be March Madness. But it can lead to some great angling opportunities particularly for bass and crappie.

Water conditions during March is a combination of thin ice and open water. Warming temperatures often leads to great shore fishing.

Fish are either in a reproduction cycle or they are eating machines. The warmer water near shore attracts them first to nesting, egg laying, nest protection, a brief period of lethargy and then voracious eating.

Changing water conditions are often a bane of the river angler. High water conditions often can be perplexing. Anglers use a rule of thumb of "water high go shallow, water falling go deeper."

High water and cool temperatures often delay the spawn.

Shallower water warms faster and spawning fish move into the stumps and submerged weeds. Cattail and arrowhead are the vegetation most often found in the shallows. Pond weed varieties and lotus are in the deeper water.

Find shallow water with a northern exposure. Crappies winter in the deep water and will move into shallows to spawn. Under flood conditions they are often back in flooded grass.

Milfoil and some pondweed species among the stump fields are good. It is important to look for cover and shallow water which retains warmth. Wood is the best cover.

Creeks tend to be muddy and cold with the runoff making them poor locations for fish. Some anglers begin at the mouth of a creek and proceed up river until they find clean water and



fish.

To catch more fish, follow them throughout the month. To increase your odds, find the food, and put your lure, or bait there.

Because the fish are in shallow water, crankbaits are difficult to use effectively. If the water is unusually cold one-fourth-ounce rattling jigs in black or chartreuse can produce.

Pre-spawn crappies teach us how to fish for all species. They require stealth, patience, ability to read the water, and sound knowledge of the species provide an apprenticeship to all fishing.

The early season crappie angler needs to pinpoint hideouts and hone his tactics to match the fast-changing conditions. Move like a ghost, silent and efficient.

The crappie feed according to weather and barometric pressure changes. The changes cause fish to move tight to cover and become inactive. The smart angler looks for warmer water. In doing so he seeks out colored water, a windward shoreline, a dark soft bottom, shallow water, tributary streams, and heat-absorbing cover such as wood.

Early season crappies are in shallower on dark, warm days and deeper on clearer, colder days. High water is common and the fish move up into the tempo-

rarily flooded vegetation. Wise anglers check a variety of depth zones and never leave out odd-ball locations.

Jigs are the most popular crappie lures. They have no action of their own. The angler provides all the action by line movement. To enhance action, use a small sinker and tie it on the end of the line. It will allow the jig to move freely and permits it to rest in a semi-vertical position.

In cold water the color of the jig is not that important. White, yellow, and black jigs cover all the bases.

Use the smallest jigs you can find. Jigs of 1/16th ounce or smaller are best. Early on it helps to add a minnow to the jig. For those who want to use plastic lures, a one-inch grub is good. Rig it with the tail down for best action.

As for fishing line, a light, small diameter line is best. You must be able to feel the tiny bump of a fish or you will miss him. Transparent four-pound test line is best. Good line is small in diameter, strong with little stretch and abrasion resistant.

There are two basic methods to catch crappie dabbling and casting/retrieving jigs.

Dabbling requires a long pole to drop the jig into pockets and

holes of heavy brush or flooded cover. A short section of line is best for moving the jig from one spot to the next. Jig it a bit and then pull up and move to the next area. Casting a jig involves casting up the shoreline and then retrieving it with a slow swimming motion.

The depth at which the jig runs varies by speeding up and slowing down the retrieve. Once fish are located at a specific depth, concentrate on that depth.

Cold water crappies are not usually aggressive feeding fish. Fish slowly. They will not chase bait very far. You must put it on their nose. Most of the bites will come as the lure is on the rise.

Determine the level of suspended fish. You need to keep your jig right among the crappie. You can count down the jig to the desired depth. By counting 1, 2, 3, etc. the jig will fall one foot for each number.

Dropping a jig to the bottom, then cranking or lifting it back up accomplishes the same thing. Crappie feed above their location as that is how they see. Once you start catching fish on the rise it tells you just how deep the fish are feeding.

Keep your technique simple. Keep an open mind. There are three keys to catching cold water crappie, using the right equipment, fishing slowly and keeping the lure where the fish are.

— **Don Gasaway** is a veteran freelance outdoor writer from Marion. He is on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/#1/DonGasawayWriter](http://www.facebook.com/#1/DonGasawayWriter) and [www.facebook.com/DonGasawayfishing](http://www.facebook.com/DonGasawayfishing). Comments and reviews are welcome.

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# The love/health connection

Love can be defined in so many ways. Most definitions go something like this: a strong emotion of affection, warmth, fondness, and regard towards a person or thing.

While it can most definitely refer to a significant other, family members, and friends = it can also refer to things like food, places, events, activities, pets, and so much more! So, what's the big deal about love? Why is it important?

**Love can make you happy:** Dopamine is the (feel-good) chemical in your brain associated with reward, so having friends and being in love can actually increase your happiness. Dopamine causes your cheeks to blush and your heart to beat a little faster.

**Love can reduce stress and anxiety:** Having a significant other can lower your stress levels by decreasing your levels of adrenaline, lowering your blood pressure, and calming your nerves. Supportive relationships and being near a loved one can provide a sense of stability and security, reducing the fight-or-flight response. Research has found that people who feel loved and supported have higher levels of oxytocin and lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

**Love reduces feelings of depression:** Healthy relationships of any kind can make you feel less isolated and more supported. Even if you do experience times of trouble or sadness, having a loved one around can help you cope better. When we feel connected to others, our brain releases those feel-good hor-



mones which help counteract feelings of anxiety and depression.

**Love helps keep your health in check:** Couples and even friends and family often encourage each other to see the doctor, and take symptoms and illnesses more seriously than they would if they were all alone. This leads to detecting more serious sicknesses in earlier stages.

**Love eases pain:** Studies have shown that physical contact like holding hands or hugging can help reduce physical pain you're experiencing. Love can also activate regions in your brain associated with pain control. Studies show that happy couples report fewer complaints of back pain and headaches.

**Love leads to a longer life:** People involved in healthy relationships typically live longer – often attributed to sustained emotional support and being held accountable to making healthier choices in food and staying active. You and your partner or friend can support each other, keep each other accountable and share goals as you work toward healthy lifestyle changes. Relationships can also provide a sense of purpose in life that can translate to

better self-care and less risk-taking. Some studies have shown these relationships attribute to better cardiovascular health and lowered risk of certain cancers and infections.

**Love can improve sleep quality:** Since positive, loving relationships help reduce stress, they can also contribute to better sleep quality. Studies suggest that happy couples sleep more soundly because they feel loved and supported.

**Love can boost your immune system:** When you feel loved, your body releases a hormone called oxytocin, which supports your immune system. It helps fight inflammation and can play a role in your immune system's defenses.

**Love can help reduce substance abuse problems:** Studies have shown that loving, healthy relationships lead to wiser choices such as choosing not to engage in drugs or alcohol as a couple/group. When friends or couples willingly choose not to engage in potentially risky activities, it provides a support system founded on accountability and honest communication.

Engaging in loving relationships, whether it be romantic

or platonic, provides you with a sense of belonging and community and trust. When you have people to call on in times of need, you feel safe and secure. When you have good news to share, the person you call to tell feels important and part of something positive.

When you recognize someone for an accomplishment, no matter how big or seemingly small, that person gets a little bit of that heart healthy adrenaline rush. Working as a team (whether that be friends, co-workers, family, significant others) we are connected through our interactions whether we realize it or not. A pat on the back for a job well done can boost someone's self-esteem. Asking a friend to go for a walk can improve mood and heart health.

A smile or a wave or a handshake can all be signs of a loving friendship...all without saying a single word. Just like that, love can spread happiness in the smallest of acts. And that is why love is an amazing gift to share.

— **Lindsey Cox** is married to Eli, a Benton native. Along with their two children, Jilianne and Crosby and dog, Lucky, they enjoy a pretty simple yet busy life. Enjoying and juggling work and life, including their kids' sporting events and involvement in the fine arts. They are members of First Christian Church in Benton. Lindsey's first book, "Last Damn Call," is now available on Amazon and discusses her past struggles in hopes of helping others still struggling with a message of hope and humor.

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# Kids, parents and sports

## February feature •

BY DAVY BROY

As most readers of this publication know, my monthly feature stories are about current or past athletes, coaches and teams from Southern Illinois.

This month, I'm going in a different direction in an attempt to address some issues with young athletes and their parents that have concerned me for quite some time. Also included in this story is an example of what I experienced as a kid with my parents, especially my dad.

Many young kids learn to love and play sports because of their mom or dad. Some kids do it naturally as if it's in their genes.

Other kids do it just to make their parents happy. As I coached youth sports for 51 years myself and the other coaches that I worked with saw that both kinds of kids were obvious.

The ones that naturally had it in their genes seemed to never get burned out and they were also the ones that worked the hardest, had the most fun competing, and they played more relaxed. Their love for the sport that they were playing was always at a high level.

I was one of those kids that had it in my blood and have just naturally loved sports since I was very young. After my playing days were over, my five decades of coaching youth sports were always about trying to help kids reach their full potential with their God-given ability.

Equally important was the fact that myself and the other coaches that I worked with tried to encourage those kids to play relaxed and to have fun and enjoyment while

they were doing it. When it comes to youth sports, this may be the most important question of all... why would you want to play a sport if you aren't enjoying it?

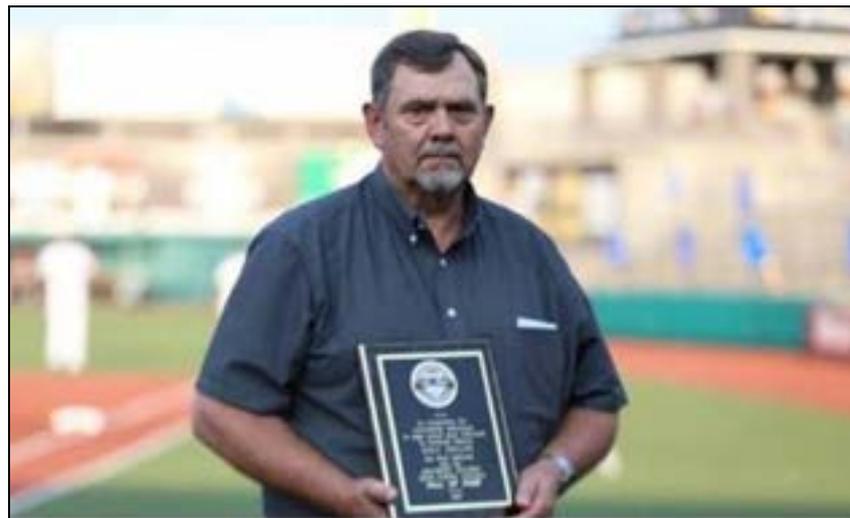
I don't claim to know it all because I don't, and I was not a perfect coach by a long shot. I'm just a 70-year-old guy who coached youth sports for a long time. What I am expressing with this story is just my honest opinion, so please take it for what it's worth.

As a coach, my most often used phrase spoken to our players was, "have fun, play your hardest, but play for yourself and your teammates and not for someone else. You can't have fun playing the game if you are always trying to live up to someone else's expectations for you."

Those words are important for a kid to hear if they feel the undue pressure of trying to live up to a parent's sometimes unreasonable expectations. Especially a parent who is trying to relive their somewhat mediocre or unsuccessful childhood sports experience through their kid.

With this story, let's take a look at that issue and other issues concerning parental interference that seem to be a bigger problem every year. Let's also take a look at the issue of some potentially good all-around athletes being encouraged by their parents to not play multiple sports and at the same time pushing them to just specialize in one sport, year-round.

The one sport specialization problem is hurting school sports (especially smaller schools) in a big way as numbers continue to decrease every year because of the lack of multiple sport athletes.



**Top picture:** Tony Phelps was the head coach of the Benton High School volleyball program for 17 years. **Bottom picture:** Ryan Miller worked for 17 years as the athletic director at Benton High School.

At the same time, people and organizations that run travel sports programs are making a ton of money off of the backs of the parents as their kid plays travel ball almost year-round.

I retired from coaching in 2024 and in our last few years our teams were blessed with some very good parents who understood “you have to let the coach, coach” and you also have to “let the kids play” with no outside interference from parents. At the same time, we witnessed some very troubling incidents where we saw just the opposite from some of the parents of the teams that we played. In my opinion, more and more parents are becoming unreasonable when it comes to their kids’ participation in sports.

Some kids mature quicker than others not just physically, but also

mentally which speeds up an athlete’s development. It was always frustrating for me as a coach to see so many parents get frustrated with their kid because, in the opinion of the parents, their kid wasn’t developing quick enough at a young age.

All kids are different, and in fairness to them, you have to let them develop in their own time, and in their own way both physically and mentally.

In my opinion, a lack of patience by parents with their kids’ development is one of the worst things that any parent could ever do. It makes the kid lose confidence in themselves and in many cases, it forces the kid to dislike sports and quit at an early age.

Some of the best high school athletes that I have ever seen were late bloomers that weren’t that

good in grade school and jr. high, but most of them matured later and thrived once that happened. Most of those late bloomers had parents who were patient with their kids’ development.

Here are some other problems that I’ve seen with parents, especially in the last few years that I coached. Some parents have no clue about the team concept and how important it is for the growth and maturity of their kid not just now but later in life. If some parents had the choice of their kid’s team winning the game (which is what we should all want) or their kid playing well with a team loss, they would selfishly choose the latter 100 percent of the time because they don’t really care that much about the team.

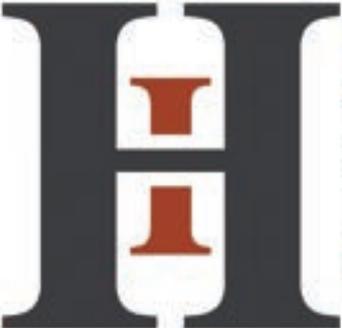
Some parents will try to coach their kid from the bleachers

which doesn’t help at all. It’s much better for the kids if parents just get out of the way when their kid is playing and let the coaches coach. Some parents will take their kid away in the middle of a game because they have hitting or pitching lessons at another location at that time. If I did that when I played as a kid, my youth coaches would have made me sit out the next game or they would have possibly dismissed me from the team.

If my parents would have complained about it, my coaches would have told them (probably with some colorful language), “hit the road.”

Some parents will disrespect their kid’s coach in front of their kid which should never happen.

see **BROY** page 24



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## BROY

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Then they'll go home and tell their kid how bad that coach is, which does nothing but hurt the kid now and in the future. There is an exception to that and I have witnessed this.

It's OK to be reasonably tough on your players, but no coach should ever be verbally, mentally or physically abusive with their players. In my opinion it's totally unacceptable and those types of coaches should never be allowed to work with young athletes.

Some parents will insist that their kid be allowed to miss an in season game or practice so that their kid can play an out of season sport.

That should never happen because it shows a lack of commitment and respect for their in-season coaches and teammates which sets a terrible example for the kid. In season sports should always have top priority.

Some parents try to control every single aspect of what a kid does in sports instead of letting their kid choose what they want to do. Most of the time the kid will be too afraid to say anything about it, so they end up resenting their parent's total control, then they start disliking sports and quite often they quit.

I have seen so many parents spend (and waste) a lot of money as they push their kids to play travel sports from as young as 8 years old. Then when the kid becomes a teenager, other factors come into play.

They get a boyfriend or girlfriend from 13 to 15, then they get their driver's license at 16, and then in some cases they decide that they would rather work and make money than to play a sport that they are tired (burnout) of playing. I sometimes wonder if the parents of the kids that quit sports at 15 or 16 wish they would



(Left) Junior Broy played for the St. Louis Cardinals minor league affiliate in Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1945. (Right) Davy Broy played wide receiver for West Frankfort High School in 1971.

have invested that large amount of money on their kid going to college or to a trade school instead of wasting it on travel sports.

I could give more examples, but I think most older people understand how things have changed for the worse when it comes to today's youth sports.

I was very fortunate as a kid to have parents that never interfered when I competed in sports. My mom was quiet and like most women from her era, she was respectful of authority, especially my teachers and coaches. My dad, Dan Broy, Jr. (most people called him Junior) was a tough, no-nonsense man, who like my mom, grew up during the Great Depression.

He had a good sports experience as he played professional, minor-league baseball for three years in the St. Louis Cardinals organization in the 1940's and then later about 10 years of semi-pro baseball in Southern Ill. He understood better than most parents how youth sports were supposed to work and what he needed to do

as a parent of a kid who loved to compete.

Because of his love for baseball, our family was obviously into that sport during the spring, summer and early fall.

Dad knew that I loved to compete in multiple sports (football, basketball, baseball, track & field) so he never pushed me to like one sport more than another or to specialize in any one sport. Dad was very hard to please, and he did push me to be the best that I could be, but he always gave me the freedom to choose what I wanted to do in sports instead of trying to control what I did. He also told me many times to do what my coaches instructed me to do at practices and games and to keep my mouth shut.

Through the encouragement of our parents, most of my friends and I in the 1960's and early 1970's, went from playing one in season sport to the next in season sport every few months and we never got burned out with any of those sports.

Dad was a semi-truck driver

for the Bonifield Brothers Trucking Co. in West Frankfort and he worked long hours Monday through Friday delivering freight throughout eastern Southern Illinois and Evansville, Indiana. He would leave for work around 9:00 every morning and he usually didn't get home until around 9:30 at night. Since our mom had a rule that we had to be in bed by 9:00 on school nights, my siblings and I didn't see or talk to our dad much at all except on the weekends.

Those weekends were important to me for a lot of reasons, especially spending time with my dad as we did things together which included practicing different sports or watching a game on television.

I have always been a huge fan of the NFL going back to when I was a young kid in the early 1960s. Watching the St. Louis football Cardinals play every Sunday afternoon on local television in the 1960s and early 70s from September through mid-December was a great experience. Yes, for you younger readers, the NFL football Cardinals used to be in St. Louis.

Some of my favorite memories with my dad were sitting in our living room watching the football Cardinals on our black and white television.

Watching those St. Louis NFL games, which almost always started at noon, was like a ritual for dad and I. That's when my love for sports really began. Just me and my dad calmly sitting in our living room and sharing thoughts as we enjoyed our time together looking at a television screen.

There was no yelling or pushing me to do something in sports. It was a quiet and educational setting that would have a great impact on my life and my love for sports over the past 60 plus years.

Looking back, I'm convinced that watching those NFL games together on television was dad's way of hoping that I would love

sports as much as he did and his plan definitely worked. My first memories of watching those games were in 1962 and I honestly don't remember hardly missing any St. Louis NFL games with dad for close to 10 years. I remember it all very vividly which proves how much of a positive impact it had on me as a young kid.

Dad's first love in sports was obviously baseball, but he also liked other sports and he knew that I did too. By the time that I was about 10 years old, dad realized that football was my first love and basketball was a close second. Despite him previously being a professional baseball player, he had no problem with that at all because he wanted me to be my own person and to do my own thing in sports. Please read those last two sentences again.

At some point during my grade school years, I told dad that my dream was to be wide receiver for the West Frankfort Red-birds. After that he would throw me passes with a football for quite a while every Sunday afternoon in our yard after every St. Louis Cardinals football game. He did it because he understood and accepted what my dream was and he wanted to help me achieve that goal, which I did.

Unfortunately, my parents divorced in the spring of 1973 which was during my senior year in high school, and that ended our 10-year string of watching NFL football together. Dad died in 1997 just four days before his 73rd birthday.

I have always appreciated the fact that my love for sports came from him. I also greatly appreciate that he encouraged me to do my own thing and have my own favorite sport even if it wasn't his favorite.

He knew how much I loved to compete so he always encouraged me to play multiple sports and to enjoy it with my teammates. He also encouraged me to have fun



Richard Glodich (right) worked for 22 years as the athletic director at West Frankfort High School. He is pictured with West Frankfort School Superintendent Matt Donkin.

with sports and to never let anyone, especially a coach, tell me that I shouldn't play another sport that I wanted to play.

I have always believed strongly that playing multiple sports and having fun with them is extremely important for a young kid. It helps them to be a more well-rounded and disciplined athlete which can help lead them to being a disciplined adult.

As I stated previously in this story, most of us see a big number problem with a lot of high school sports today, and in my opinion, the cause is obvious. We have too many kids being pushed by their interfering parents (and sometimes coaches) as they want the kid to focus on the specialization of just one sport, almost year-round.

In my opinion, that can easily lead to burnout and the loss of love for that sport which is the exact opposite of having fun with it.

As I was working on this story,

I decided to ask two former, long time high school athletic directors, and one former, long time head coach to give me their opinions on some of the issues that are a part of this story. Ryan Miller, who is currently the assistant principal at Benton High School, previously worked for 17 years (2007-2024) as a well-respected Benton High School athletic director. This is what he said about the current state of high school athletics.

"Here are the changes that I've seen over the past 25 years in education based athletics.

"1. The explosion of travel sports and the concentration on those sports. "With the increase of indoor facilities in the Midwest, youth sports have become year-round for those that choose to specialize in a particular sport. I think in some cases when parents push their kids to start playing travel sports at an early age, there is an increase in burnout. There are some kids that are even foregoing playing at their school, and they are only playing travel ball all year.

"2. The internet and online gaming. "When I was growing up, you played outside, but that is hardly the case for lots of kids these days. Kids are born with a screen in their face! Social media, online games, etc. These are things that kids do to occupy their time. It's much easier to play Madden 26 than to put in the blood, sweat and tears. Sports are hard work!

"3. Jobs. "There seems to be a lot more kids that are working than there used to be. Kids want to have a car and money in their pocket."

Richard Glodich worked for 22 years (1995-2017) as a well-respected athletic director at West Frankfort High School. He had this to say about the importance of playing multiple sports.

"Athletes that play multiple sports develop physical skills and

help them stay in shape. The kids are less likely to get injured compared to athletes that specialize in one sport and play it year-round. (Due to specific muscles and joints that are used in each sport).

"Sometimes travel ball emphasizes winning over teaching kids to be good people. The cost financially can be too high for some families. Kids today seem to be losing pride in their community and playing on their hometown teams. I believe the travel team concept, at an early age, may be contributing to burnout and a lack of interest as the athletes get older."

Well respected, former Benton High School head volleyball coach Tony Phelps had outstanding success with his Rangerette program with an overall 17-year record of 476-148 from the 1998-99 school year through 2014-15. He places most of the blame for the numbers problem with high school sports, and also a shortage of people willing to coach, on interfering parents.

"I had few problems with parents in my almost 20 years of coaching volleyball at Benton, but I perceive that has changed in recent years. Two of my former players and one of my former assistants have taken a shot at coaching volleyball at Benton. I have naturally encouraged them and been in regular contact with them.

"I fully understand that coaches aren't perfect and can make mistakes. But the three ladies I refer to were overwhelmed with parental complaints and accusations and their total tenure was only five years combined.

Although administrators were informed and consulted with, no solution was apparently found and these coaches were driven out or quit (depending on who you talked to).

# BROY

from page 25

“A society phenomenon called CANCEL CULTURE has seemingly taken over. Winning is expected, but don’t be too tough on them. Keep kids in line, but rules must meet parent’s expectations. Play everyone, especially my kid. Make sure my kid gets a scholarship because they played club ball and are certainly good enough to make a college team.

“I was tough on kids and my players would mostly tell you that. I often think I had few problems with parents in volleyball

for two reasons — I am a male coach and my teams won consistently. But I know many male coaches today who are winning who are being backstabbed by parents. Female coaches seemingly aren’t taken seriously or something. I don’t know.

“So maybe I got out of coaching high school sports just in time. I fear the days of coaches staying at one school for 20 to 30 years or more may be over. The grief is just not worth it. Boards and administrators have got to step up and put a stop to this interference or I fear the present revolving door for coaches will keep turning and the apparent numbers problem with

high school sports will continue to get worse.”

As I was finishing up this story, I was reminded of something that an older coach told me when I was an extremely competitive 13-year-old. It was 57 years ago so I’m paraphrasing his important message.

“Sports aren’t life or death. They are meant to teach discipline and teamwork which are attributes that will help you as an adult.”

I completely understand that most parents want their kid to be good at sports and that’s just human nature.

With all due respect to every parent, some have become way

too unreasonable when it comes to their expectations and the end results. I’ll close with some important statistics that every sports parent needs to understand.

According to ncaa.org, of the 8.2 million high school student-athletes in the United States, only seven percent go on to play in college and only two percent earn any type of scholarship.

Finally, there are more than 550,000 college student-athletes each year and less than two percent of those athletes play professionally.



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# A welcome haven for travel ball

BY RANDY OLSON  
*AreaSports.net*

Travel team baseball and softball is becoming increasingly popular across southern Illinois as more and more teams are formed each year.

One of the biggest issues for travel teams is finding adequate space to practice as a team and work on individual skills, particularly when weather is an issue.

A few years ago, after the pandemic, a group of parents from Jefferson County were involved in filling a void by forming a travel baseball and softball team.

Through their painstaking efforts, the group has also been able to solve a problem, not only for themselves, but to the benefit of other regional travel teams who come in and utilize their two large indoor facilities in Mt Vernon. LLB Sports, Inc is the technical name of the non-profit 501(c)3 organization that was founded in 2022.

The group started out by forming travel baseball and softball teams for area youth under a team identity known as “The Renegades.”

Many of the parents, who became the initial board members or officers within the organization had business ownership and management skills as well as knowledge of baseball and softball fundamentals that they could utilize in providing coaching and instruction, while building a business plan, and begin fund-raising efforts to enable the Renegades to get established, and seek out other players and parents in order to grow the organization as a unified group with a common purpose.

The recipe has been successful, although it has taken a lot of

work and long hours to not only establish multiple teams, but to build a facility to meet their own needs as well as the needs of others. Brandon Schulte is the current president of the organization.

“We actually have multiple divisions within the organization at this time,” said Schulte. “We have our travel division that currently includes 10 different travel teams which range in age from 8U to 16U. We also have the Recreation League that we oversee for the City of Mt Vernon that we organize and do baseball and softball for.

“We also have Rec Flag football that we do in Mt Vernon because the City needed help, and now we have ‘The Yard’ Athletic Training Complex on North Salem Road in Mt Vernon which consist of a large Main Building with turf, and a secondary building known as the Dugout, which has a subscription policy where users can come and go as they please with a key fob through their annual membership.

“They get online through an App which we provide, which enables them to schedule and book practice time in that building anytime there is availability day or night, 365 days a year.”

Travis Pinkston is the vice president of the organization and explains the make-up of the group.

“We currently have seven board members and three officers, and we usually meet on the first Sunday of the month,” said Pinkston. “It’s a great group, and we all get along well because we share the same vision and goals, and we all want to see this be successful to benefit the kids. None of us get paid. It is all volunteer work, and a lot of it.”



Left to right: Brandon Schulte (president), Travis Pinkston (vice-president) and Ryan Storey (board member) from the the non-profit organization which operates “The Yard.”

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Undertaking a project like this takes a lot of sweat. The organization had very humble beginnings.

“We started out at the old ice plant warehouse that the Flota family had east of Mt Vernon,” said Schulte.

“It was a good place to start, back when we only had four travel teams, but we outgrew that building quickly after about a year, because like I said earlier, we now have ten travel teams under the Renegades name.” The organization began working on renovations to the old lumber yard on North Salem Road in Mt. Vernon back in June of 2024. It had been sitting idle for a while and needed some TLC as well as remodeling to meet their needs, including insulation, new ceiling, new furnaces, new drywall, turf flooring, batting cages, and protective fencing for spectators in the waiting area where they can observe private lessons or group practices.

“We moved into the main building on Salem Road in October of 2024, just in time for the winter season, which is when our facility is the busiest, due to the weather and the inability for anyone to consistently practice outdoors,” said Schulte.

“Last summer is when we started working on renovation of the secondary building we call the Dugout, and even though we are already using it, there are still many more things that we still need and plan to do to it, as the funds become available.”

Fund-raising is at the heart of the effort to keep this organization functioning and growing. As stated earlier, nobody gets paid, but there are a lot of bills including the leasing of the buildings, insurance, heating and cooling costs, etc.

“We do 50/50 raffles with all of our teams, and we encourage each of the players and their parents to get involved to help pro-

mote and facilitate the raffles,” said Schulte. “We also run the concession stand at Cusumano Park in Mt Vernon through the volunteer efforts of our members and parents. The city owns the fields, but they allow us to run the concession stand and give the city a cut of the funds off the top.”

“Everyone jumps in and gets involved,” said Pinkston. “It’s like a giant family; all of the spouses and kids pitch in and help. It takes a village, and lots of volunteers, but collectively we all jump in and make it happen through regular rotations.”

Being a member of a travel team with the Renegades does require you to pay a “player fee” which the group tries to keep to a minimum compared to what you might see in the city.

“We do our best to keep them low, with the understanding that everyone joins in with the fund-raising efforts, because that is how we can function and keep the fees low.” said Schulte.

How far do they travel to go play? It is really up to the individual coach of each travel team and their preferences.

“As a coach myself, I personally prefer to stay within a two-hour drive because I don’t want to burn vacation days,” said Pinkston.

“That means we can work our jobs as usual on Friday, leave Friday evening and travel to the destination and play a competitive weekend schedule, but travel home on Sunday, so we do not typically miss any work on our regular jobs. So, we might go as far as Branson, Missouri or Cape Girardeau, for example, or other locations in the Metro St Louis area.”

The Renegades softball team coached by Travis Pinkston is rated as the No. 2 travel team in the state in their age group.



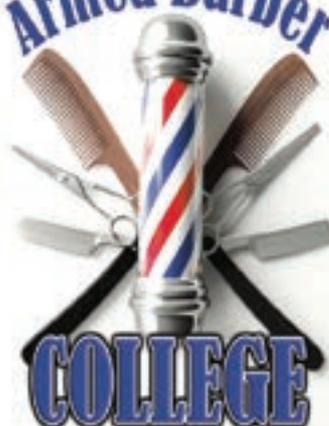
Independent instructor Kevin Tate tosses a ball to a batter as they work on hitting skills.



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## THE YARD

from page 29

They are very competitive, and they make great use of the indoor facilities at “The Yard” during these cold winter months.

“Now we also have basketball instructors utilizing the facility during these winter months to do individual instruction, and we have even had a soccer team reach out to us and use the large turf area that we have for practicing and working out indoors,” said Pinkston. “The demand is growing, and we are happy to supply a training facility for any travel team that wants to come in and schedule some time in the buildings, and we are also open for any independent instructor who wants to set-up and provide lessons indoors for any sport

that they specialize in whether that is baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, volleyball or whatever. Reach out to us and let’s see if we can help each other.”

Walker Brockhouse, a pitcher in the Houston Astros MLB organization for the last few years, is currently providing independent baseball pitching instruction to aspiring pitchers at The Yard in Mt Vernon.

“What a great opportunity to learn some fundamentals of pitching from a real pro,” said Pinkston. “Brockhouse and all of the other independent instructors working out of this facility set their own hours, schedule their own lessons for the rates that they desire. They pay our organization a small fee to utilize the space, which in turn helps us pay the light bill and the heating bill.”



Renegades Coach Justin Cantrell works with players on proper fielding techniques. Cantrell is a former baseball player at Rend Lake College.

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Other independent instructors available to the public at “The Yard” include: Lilly Pepper-basketball; Kevin Tate, Chris Dalton, and Ryan Perigo for hitting instruction; Ryan Perigo in addition to Walker Brockhouse for baseball pitching instruction; Emma Williamson and Danica Tobin for softball pitching instruction; Arwyn Wilkey for catching instruction.

How big is the facility? The Main Building at “The Yard” is around 11,000 square feet, while the secondary «Dugout» building is around 6,000 square feet. Multiple batting cages, pitching lanes, and fielding areas are available, as well as an individualized basketball instruction area. That is certainly large enough to accommodate a lot of teams and individual youth who want to practice and work on their game. When asked where the name “The Yard” came from, I got smiles from many in the room.

“We had a lengthy conversation about that as a group, and it is really kind of a play on words because this place used to be known as a lumber yard, and we often use the phrase of hitting a home run or going ‘yard’ in baseball or softball,” said Schulte. “So, by calling it “The Yard” it just seems appropriate, and it fits our purposes for many different reasons.”

We mentioned earlier that

other travel teams are starting to use “The Yard” as a practice facility which is exactly what the group wanted to see.

“Currently we have the Mt Vernon Lightning travel team coming in here regularly, we also have the local high school baseball and softball teams that have met here to practice indoors, and we have seen some of the County grade school teams come in here and practice when the weather was bad,” said Schulte. “We want everyone to know and understand that these buildings are not exclusive to the Renegades teams. We welcome and encourage other travel teams to reach out to us if they need a place to practice or work out. We want to be a resource for them too. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

— *If you are reading this story and you want to reach out to the Renegades to learn more about utilizing “The Yard” for team practice, or perhaps the individual instruction opportunities, or membership and key fob access to the 24-hour Dugout building, just visit the Renegades Facebook page and message them there to make contact and learn more. You can also stop by the Main Building facility of “The Yard” at 1309 Salem Road in Mt Vernon. The link to their Facebook page is: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083476741854>*



Professional baseball pitcher Walker Brockhouse of the Houston Astros organization demonstrates proper pitching techniques on the indoor mound. Brockhouse is an Independent Instructor available at The Yard.



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# The Mind Game

As the spring semester is in full swing, my day-to-day life has seen many changes. From practice, practice, and a little more practice to now being in season with travel weekends and new classes, it has been very easy to get caught up in the speed of life.

Although it's been busy, this semester has already provided me with countless opportunities and memories. From competing in meets and even having the chance to compete at the University of Indiana against teams such as Alabama, Ohio State, Cincinnati, and even Wisconsin, to new and exciting classes, there is much joy to be had this semester.

Along with the challenges that have arisen from the transition from offseason to season and from semester to semester, a major athletic shift has also occurred within me. Going from high school to the Division 1 collegiate level of athletics is a mental and physical complete change in which not only I but countless individuals have experienced.

I commonly found myself in a state of being excited for the season to begin, sitting on expectations and hopes for the freshman season, while also being realistic. Realistic in the sense of countless conversations with my coach and teammates, as we discussed that to succeed, the foundation on which I will build my success must first be formed. These foundations have been formed from the beginning of off season, whether it's been time spent in Banterra with my teammates lifting copious amounts of weights or attempting to swing a twenty-pound ball on a chain around and around in a six-foot space, the process of building my foundations has been quite the experience.



rience.

I wake up every single day with an incredible amount of appreciation all while looking forward to what is next. The transition to competing against others in all of my sports in high school, while being in a position of regular success, to now being a freshman again, competing against adults that have had the time to build their foundations, all while tak-

ing part in a very individualized sport, has presented some challenges. Through the mental and physical challenges of no longer winning, in complete honesty, I have found that while I am in fact still in competition with others, I must also compete with my own mind.

I am in a position now where the foundations are and will continue to be formed. But it takes time,

discipline, and patience. So even on the days when I feel so frustrated weather it's with a rough practice, hard day in class, or even one of those I need my family moments, I know all that has been a part of building my foundation to handle hardship will lead me to a solution.

With track, I am okay knowing that first I must compete with myself. Internal competition in terms of pushing harder, while also allowing myself grace. Because in truth, while there is so much to love and appreciate, it would be dishonest to say that it can't be hard. The body can only do so much if we do not believe that we are capable.

Although it can sound cliché, we truly are capable of much more than we can ever imagine, but to fully reach a higher level of performance, we have to win the mental struggle that tells us no. Each day, I work to not let my mind hold me back from accomplishing success at this stage of life because the opportunities are endless and it's up to me to be brave enough to use them.

— **Maya Rounds** is a freshman at Southern Illinois University where she is studying Elementary Education and is on the track and field team. A 2025 Sesser-Valier graduate, Maya has a deep love for athletics and all of the opportunities they have blessed her with. Maya enjoys spending her time with family and friends, making memories at SIU, and listening to all things Taylor Swift. In her column *Open and Honest*, Maya hopes to share an inside on what it means to be a college athlete and a bit about life too!



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# 'February Fever' leads to 'March Madness!'

Now that we have January behind us — a month that had 974 days, or so it seems — let's turn our attention to the second month on the calendar. And of course, that means that "February Fever" is about to sweep through the state.

For those of you who might be wondering what in the heck I'm talking about, February Fever is a prelude to "March Madness" – a basketball phenomenon that has been known to make grown men jump up and down like little girls and also unashamedly shed more than a few tears.

In short, things are about to get really interesting, really quick for high school basketball junkies!

While interest for high school basketball enthusiasts peaks every year in February and March, it seems that this year has drawn even more excitement, particularly at the Class 1A level.

So, I'm going to spend my time with you this month, in this space, looking ahead to what is shaping up to be a high stake, high drama finish to the 2025-26 boys' high school basketball season for small schools.

I have followed high school basketball since I was a kid, and you can tell by looking at the picture that accompanies this column that has been a few days ago, and I have never seen more talk, anticipation and outright drama about post-season play than this year. And I'm talking about folks talking and strategizing in December and January.

In other words, excitement is off-the-charts and we are still three weeks away from the start of regional tournament play.

Back in my radio days at WQRL, I hosted a weekly show called, "Saturday Morning Talking Sports." When post season assignments were posted the conversation



<p><b>Campbell Hill (Trico) Sectional (32T)</b>  <b>Manager: Drew Franklin</b>            Phone: 618-426-1111            E-mail: <a href="mailto:df Franklin@trico175.org">df Franklin@trico175.org</a></p> <p><b>Sub-Sectional A</b>            Campbell Hill (Trico)            Christopher            #Elverado (Elverado)            Lebanon            Marissa (Coop)            New Athens            Okawville            Sesser (S. Valler)            #Sparta            Steelville            Valmeyer            Watonville            Waterloo (Gibault Catholic)            Woodlawn            Zeigler (Z. Royaltan)</p> <p><b>Sub-Sectional B</b>            Cairo            Carrier Mills (C.M. Stonelort)            #Cobden            Dongola            Elizabethtown (Hardin County)            Galatia            Golconda (Pope County)            Goreville            Joppa (J. Maple Grove)            #Junction (Gallatin County)            Marion (Crab Orchard)            Mounds (Meridian)            Norris City (N.C. Omaha-Enfield)            Tamm (Egyptian)            Thompsonville            Ullin (Century)            Wolf Lake (Shawnee)</p>	<p><b>Nokomis Sectional (29T)</b>  <b>Manager: Ryan Lightle</b>            Phone: 217-563-4323            E-mail: <a href="mailto:ryanlightle@nokomis.k12.il.us">ryanlightle@nokomis.k12.il.us</a></p> <p><b>Sub-Sectional A</b>            Athens            Barry (Western)            Concord (Triopia) (Coop)            Franklin (Coop)            Groesview            Griggsville (G. Perry) (Coop)            Jacksonville (Rout)            Liberty            Mt. Sterling (Brown County)            #New Berlin            #Payson (Seymour)            Springfield (Calvary)            Springfield (Lutheran)            Winchester (Coop)</p> <p><b>Sub-Sectional B</b>            #Bunker Hill            Carlyle            #Carrollton            Dupu            Edinburg (Coop)            Greenfield            Hardin (Calhoun) (Coop)            Madison            Maryville (M. Christian)            Mt. Olive            Mulberry Grove            Nokomis            Paines            Raymond (Lincolnwood) (Coop)            White Hall (North Greene)</p>
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began and we would spend the best part of two hours interviewing coaches, talking and predicting what might happen. And then in the coming weeks pairings and brackets were posted and the temperature started to rise on February Fever. I still count those February and March shows as some

of the highlights of my career. It was just great radio and great fun!

You will notice that a graphic accompanies this column, which contains the assignments for "most" Class 1A schools from our area. The reason I say "most" is because there are a couple of noticeable absences from the list

I posted and I will talk about that later.

In the event that you've never visited the IHSA website, let me say that they do a wonderful job keeping it updated and easy to follow for post season. You will notice that the Class 1A teams are broken down into two Sub-Sectionals- listed as A and B. Those two sub-sectionals feed into the Jacksonville Super Sectional that will be played on March 9, 2026. Interestingly, the Class 2A schools still feed into the Carbondale Super Sectional, played at SIUC, also on March 9, 2026.

Let's break the 1A side down a little more. And again, I am doing this as if you have not been to this website. You will notice that at the top it says "Campbell Hill (Trico) Sectional (32T)" and on the other side is says "Nokomis Sectional (29T)". That means that the Trico Sectional winner and the Nokomis Sectional winner will meet at Jacksonville in the super sectional. How teams get to those sectionals is the fun part.

There are two sub-sectionals — 32 teams on the Trico side and 29 on the Nokomis side — and on each side and you will notice that there is a # sign beside two teams in each sub-sectional. Those are the four teams that are hosting the regionals that will feed into the respective sectionals. For instance, on the Trico Sectional side, Elverado and Sparta are hosting regionals in Sub-Sectional A and Sparta and Junction (Gallatin County) are hosting regionals in Sub-Sectional B.

The IHSA will announce the seedings at 4 p.m. on February 12, 2026 and then the brackets the following day on February 13, 2026.

When the seedings are announced the IHSA will separate the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds and send them to separate regionals.

For instance, based on where we stand as of this writing on February 1, 2026, it would seem that Woodlawn and Waltonville will be the two top seeds, meaning that one of them would go to Elverado and the other to Sparta. Then the remaining teams are sent to the two regionals based on seed and (allegedly) on geographical location. Personally, I don't put a lot of stock in the "geographical" part of that equation because I have seen teams that were located 10 miles from a regional site drive 50 miles in the opposite direction.

I think one interesting note to pay close attention to is the Woodlawn/Waltonville seedings. One of those teams is going to end up at the Sparta Regional, where the host Bulldogs will be waiting. Sparta is a quality team and on

their homecourt will be hard to beat. To me, that seeding in itself will have a big bearing on post season play!

I mentioned earlier that there are a couple of notable exceptions in the regional/sectional assignments I posted. Webber Township, who is one of the top 1A teams in our area, and Lawrenceville (who is currently ranked No. 1 in most statewide 1A polls) will go a different direction on the post-season tournament trail. They will play in regionals in either Altamont or Louisville (North Clay) that feed into the Macon Meridian Sectional, who will play the winner of the Danville Schlarman Sectional at the Charleston Super Sectional, at Eastern Illinois University. In short, the only way Webber or Lawrenceville would meet

a team from our two sub-sectionals would be at Champaign in the semi-finals.

So, to add a little bit of fun to all these assignments, pairings and brackets, let me move out on to a wobbly limb and make a few "guesses" about how I predict this post season will shake out during this sometimes crazy, topsy-turvy Class 1A season. I believe it will be Goreville and Hardin County advancing to the Trico Sectional along with Waltonville and Woodlawn. However, keep in mind that Sparta will have a lot to say about that, so don't count the Bulldogs out of the mix. Also, Lawrenceville and Webber Township will both win their respective regionals and meet in a sectional matchup at Macon Meridian.

But, keep in mind that on the

morning I am writing this the temperature is hovering around minus-3 degrees, so there is a very good possibility that my crystal ball is frozen over. In other words, your guess is as good as mine!

Let the craziness, joy, despair, elation, depression and off-the-charts fun of February Fever and March Madness begin!

— **Jim Muir** is a veteran Southern Illinois journalist, working more than 25 years as a writer/columnist for the *Benton Evening News* and the *Southern Illinoisian* and as a broadcaster at WQRL in Benton as the *Voice of the Benton Rangers*. Along with his role as publisher of SISC he also serves as Franklin County Circuit Clerk, a position he has held since 2016.



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#### 12-WEEK CLASSES: FEBRUARY 9 – MAY 14

Class	Day(s)/Time
English Composition II	*Hybrid – MWF at 11:00-11:50am
Speech	*Hybrid – Tuesdays & Thursdays at 11:00-11:50am
Art Appreciation	*Hybrid – Tuesdays & Thursdays at 12:30-1:45pm
World Civilization II	Online Only
Genetics	Online Only

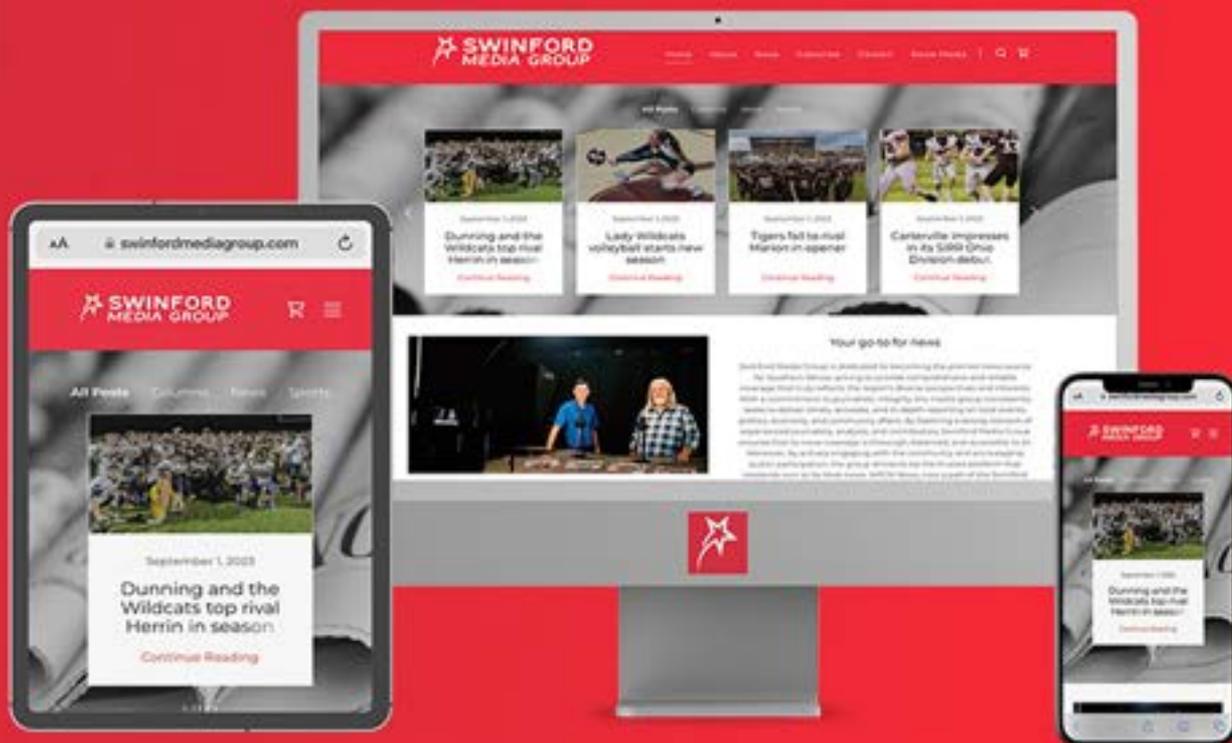
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Walt's Pizza  
CVS Pharmacy  
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Kroger's  
Walgreens  
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Senior Citizen Center  
Marion Carnegie Library

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Easy Coin Laundry  
Johnston City Food Shop

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Herrin City Library  
Walmart  
Kroger's  
Farm Fresh  
Chuck's BBQ  
Polar Whip  
Energy Village Hall  
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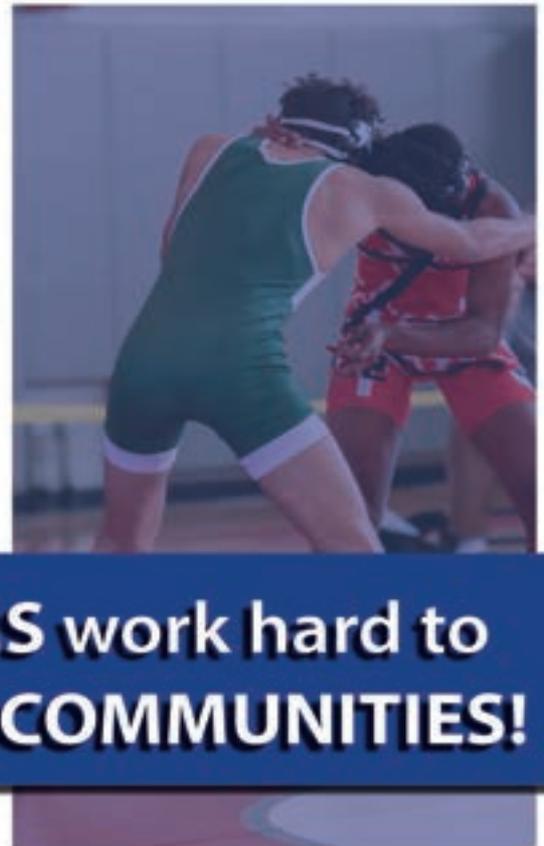
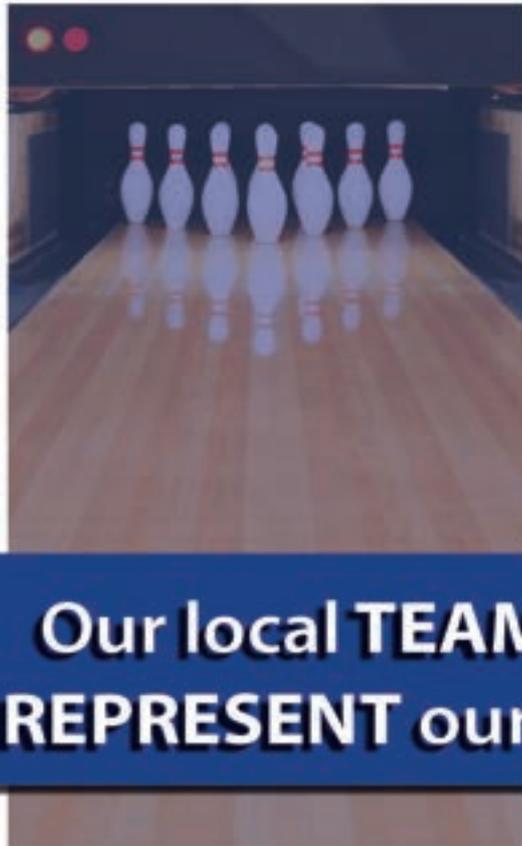
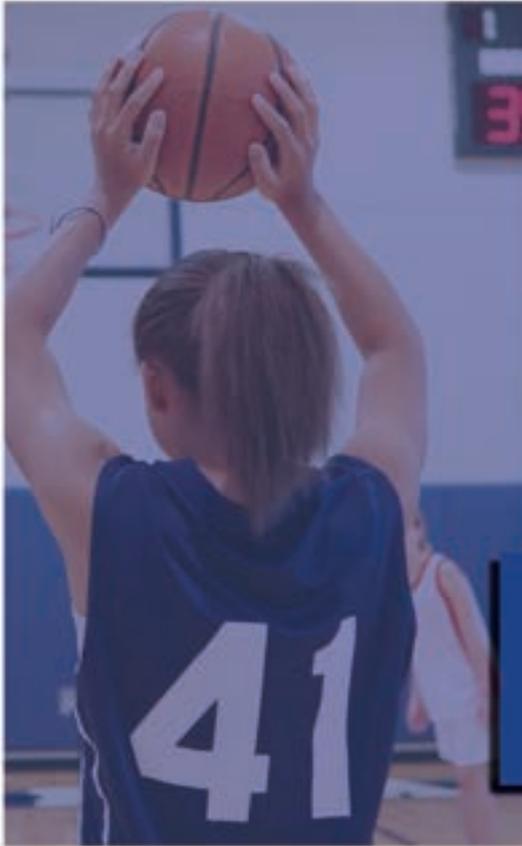
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