

Upended at Upperman



Bunker Brock takes a shot at Upperman Friday. The Pioneers saw their six-game winning streak snapped by the Bees.

Jacob Dodd photos

Winning streak ends

BY **JEFFERY SIMMONS**
Sportswriter for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Streaks are always going to end, but WCHS coach Chris Sullens didn't need long to figure out why his team's six-game winning streak was snapped Friday. After a lackluster 73-45 loss at Upperman, Sullens pointed the finger directly at himself. "It was the worst performance I've ever seen out of a Warren County-coached team by this coaching staff," said Sullens. "It's on us. We didn't do a good enough job

coaching them." Warren County (14-3) hadn't lost since Dec. 14 when it traveled to Tullahoma. The Wildcats, before Friday, were the only team to hang a loss on the Pioneers. The Bees changed that, and snapped the Warren County winning streak, all at once. Led by Alex Rush's game-high 19 points, 15 coming in the fourth quarter, the Bees improved to 14-2. Upperman also avenged a 67-59 loss suffered Nov. 20 at Charlie Dalton Gym. The Pioneers seemed off from the start. Coming in

averaging over 70 points per game, Warren County scored just seven points in the first quarter. Sophomore Irving Espinoza drilled two 3-pointers in the period, a feat Donovan McAllister matched as the Bees took a 15-7 lead. Warren County's offensive woes continued in the second quarter. The Pioneers struggled to get the lid off the rim, while Upperman's Collin Gore scored eight in the second to push the home team ahead 37-17 by halftime.

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Lady Bees sting WCHS

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If Friday's game at Upperman felt familiar for the Lady Pioneers, it's only because they've seen the Akira Levy show before. Upperman's talented senior poured in 31 points to help the Lady Bees sting Warren County 78-36. "We lost the good energy we had going for us in the first half," said WCHS coach Shea Panter. "We gave away too many turnovers to begin the second half." Warren County (10-8) knew all too well what Levy,

the Western Kentucky commit, was capable of before taking the court. Levy was a nightmare for the Lady Pioneers in the team's first matchup - a 75-30 demolition at Charlie Dalton Gym Nov. 20. She was better in the rematch. Levy did all of her damage in the first three quarters, guiding her team to a mercy-rule lead before watching the entire fourth quarter. Levy was particularly destructive in the third quarter, when the Lady Bees grew a 37-26 halftime lead to an insurmountable 65-29 advantage.

Levy spearheaded the 28-3 quarter, scoring 14 points during the span. Her full range of skills were on display - two long 3-pointers, steals leading to easy layups, contested finishes at the rim and a full command of the Upperman attack. Levy drew thunderous applause when she hit the bench for good. Warren County only scored 10 points in the second half, four coming from Beth Vaughn in the fourth quarter and three scored by Rhealee Johnson in the final period.

Continued on **2B**



Tyra Wright tries to finish around the rim against Upperman Friday night. Despite Wright's 11 points, the Lady Pioneers fell 78-36 against the undefeated Lady Bees.

Perils of backing Jags, Bortles

It's a dirty secret that I usually keep to myself. Each Sunday in the fall and winter, I usually sit alone, slip on a Jaguars jersey and cheer on my favorite NFL team since before I was a teenager. When people find out I'm a Jaguars fan - it's usually the weeks when they face off with the Titans and I can't hide my disgust for the local team - I always hear the same question: Why are you a Jags fan? Well, it's because when I was growing up, my favorite Tennessee Volunteer was RB James "Little Man" Stewart. When he went pro, he was one of the first selec-



tions by the expansion Jaguars. My parents got me a Stewart jersey, and I started wearing it while I watched their games. During the first year, Mark Brunell emerged on the scene as one of the NFL's best quarterbacks. More importantly to 12-year-old me, he was a lefty like me

and was destroying NFL defenses (the Jaguars made the AFC championship game in 1996, just their second season). So I had a lefty QB to cheer for and my favorite running back. I was sold. In the following years, Jacksonville would continue to add Volunteers, most notably Outland Trophy winner John Henderson. I was tied to the Jaguars before the Titans ever arrived in Tennessee, and I wasn't going to switch allegiances. While Brunell was around, it was easy being a Jaguars fan. Even when Byron Leftwich took the mantle, I

was OK. I thought David Garrard was the beginning of the end, though he was the leader of the last Jaguars playoff team - the 2007 Jags who went into Pittsburgh and took down the Steelers in a snowstorm. The NFL is a quarterback league. Succeeding without a talented signal caller is almost impossible. It's no wonder I've had a decade of despair following the Jags, with an aging Garrard being replaced by first-round bust Blaine Gabbert, who was then succeeded by Blake Bortles. I hated the Gabbert pick as it happened. It only looks worse now as the Jags

traded up to draft the Missouri quarterback - one pick before the Texans took J.J. Watt. When Gabbert was about done, the Jags entered another draft with the third pick. Everybody loved a UCF product who could be "the next Ben Roethlisberger." The only time I've ever thought Bortles and Roethlisberger have been comparable since the 2014 draft was in week 5 when the Jaguars dismantled the Steelers, aided by Big Ben's five interceptions. It's not fun rooting for Bortles. His name has become synonymous with

bad quarterback play. Yet somehow, the Jaguars are division champs (In your face Jerrell Casey!), finished 10-6 and are at home for a playoff game. On the opposite side, the feel-good Buffalo Bills are looming. Just a week after breaking the longest playoff drought in sports, the Bills have a chance to win the bad quarterback bowl between Bortles and Tyrod Taylor. The only hope I have is the NFL's best defense leads the Jaguars to victory - likely needing to score on its own to do it. Welcome to being a Jags fan. It's the best.




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